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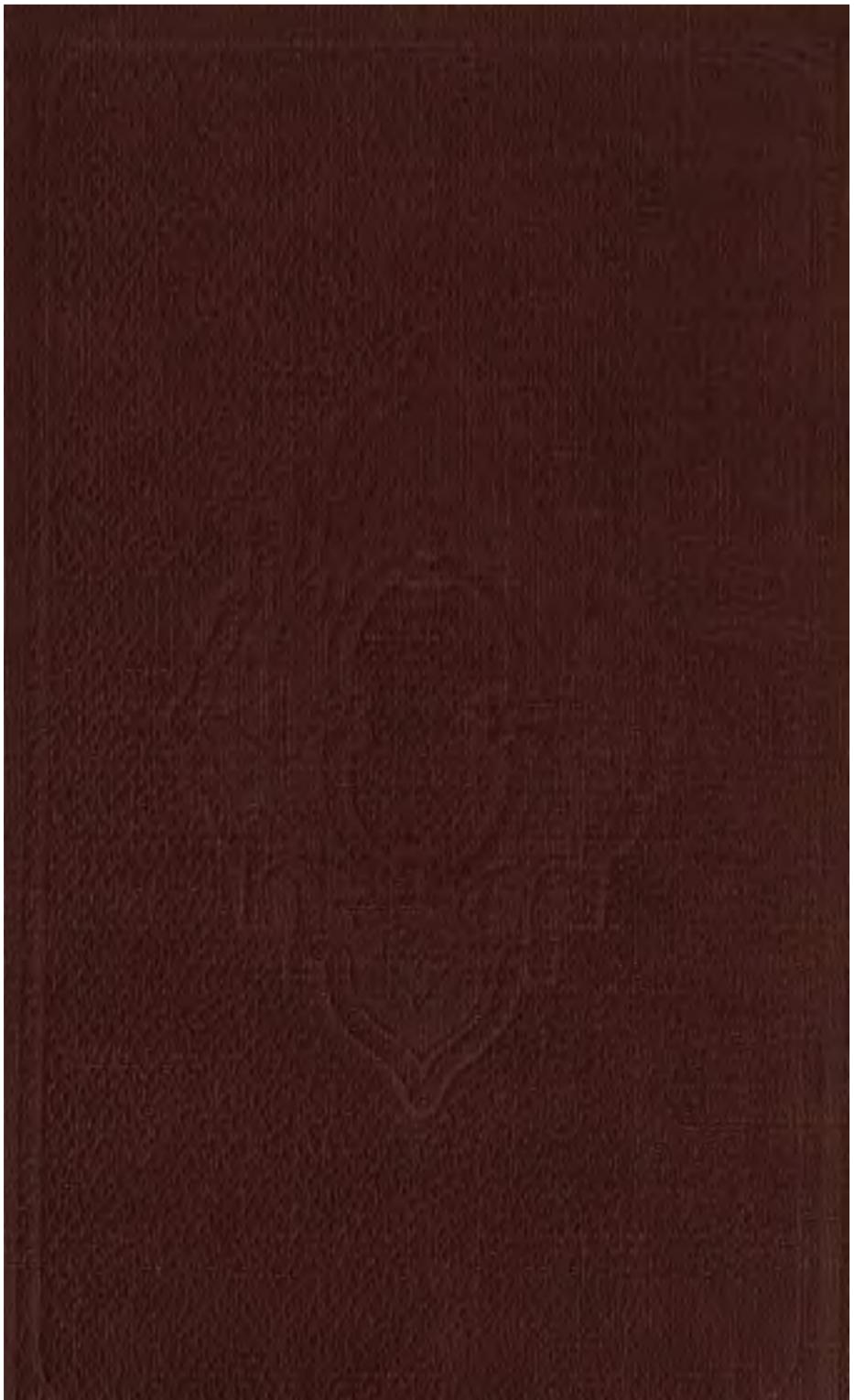
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THE COTTON LORD.

BY HERBERT GLYN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE COTTON LORD.

CHAPTER I.

CHANGES.

“MARIANNE, come down to your music lesson directly,” screamed Mrs. Grey from the foot of the stairs; “here, Miss Hall’s been here three-quarters of an hour by my watch, and you’ve never been in the room!”

“Ellen is there, mamma, and she can’t teach two at once,” replied the young lady so summoned, appearing from above, fastening a comb in her curls.

“But you ought to be in the room while she’s having her lesson; it does as much good as being taught yourself.”

“And sickens me of music altogether; but it need not, for I hate it enough already,” said Marianne, with a pout.

"Go in, at any rate, as I bid you. I declare I won't pay money for what you don't receive; and the expense is really awful."

"Well, I for one don't care how soon you give over. I want a music master; a woman has really no style."

"Oh, Mrs. Wills recommended Miss Hall as a young person of very superior education, you know, Marianne."

Marianne muttered something decidedly derogatory to Mrs. Wills' judgment in such matters, and went into the dining-room, where the music lesson was proceeding, and where, from its vicinity, every word of the foregoing conversation had been distinctly heard.

Miss Margaret Hall, music teacher, was standing at the piano, overlooking the younger Miss Grey. The only evidence she allowed to show that she had heard her name used, was an increased pressure of her lips against each other, and a flush on her ordinarily pale face. Personally she was, perhaps, but little changed since we last met her, save that there was that look of suppressed pain upon her face, and that she was a little thinner in figure; but adversity is a wonderful teacher, and a stolid, practical patience seemed to have given place to

her old quick and excited manner. Margaret had learnt what it was to be poor, and also the necessity of conciliating others, to enable her to live.

Besides the pupils and their teacher, there was a gentleman seated at the window reading.

"Oh, Mr. Iliffe, I did not know you were here!" said Miss Grey, giving him her hand. "Will you not come into the other room? I am sure you cannot read in this noise."

"It does not disturb me in the least, I assure you, Miss Grey; I availed myself of your mother's kind permission of making myself at home and coming in without ceremony."

"It was hardly fair not to have told us, though; mamma will be quite vexed when she knows it."

There was a beautiful bouquet of hothouse flowers lying at Mr. Iliffe's hand, and Marianne pounced upon them.

"What beautiful flowers! may I look at them?"

"Certainly; I am carrying them to a friend of mine who once had them at her own command, but now seldom sees them."

"Indeed."

Mr. Iliffe resumed his reading, and Miss Grey went to the piano. The flowers ought to have been for her; perhaps on coming in, she thought they

were, for the owner of them was to her thinking a very timid gentleman, and might possibly be cherishing feelings towards her that, though his modesty would not allow him to make an avowal, yet might declare themselves in some such delicate offerings.

However that might be, he evinced no desire of any further conversation, but remained seemingly absorbed in his book during the rest of the lesson; scarcely, indeed, ever glancing at the trio at the piano: at the close, when Miss Hall was quietly assuming her bonnet and shawl, he rose too.

"You are not going, Mr. Iliffe; we dine at two," said Miss Grey.

"Thank you, you must excuse me to-day. I am engaged here to-morrow."

"For the exhibition. Pray don't be late."

Miss Hall took up her roll of music, and wished the girls good morning. Mr. Iliffe would not be included in the adieu.

"I think we are both going the same way, Miss Hall," he said, quite as a matter of course, when they were out of doors.

Margaret wanted to say they were not, for she had no wish Mr. Iliffe should know where she lived: once she had been proud of her home, but it was altered now; and, judging Mr. Iliffe from his friends

the Greys, she thought poverty would be despicable in his eyes, as in theirs.

"Yours is a wearing profession, Miss Hall. Sitting listening this morning has raised my opinion of womanly patience considerably," said Mr. Iliffe. "I could not do it."

"Call it indifference, and you will be nearer the truth," Margaret replied. "I am obliged to spend two hours in Mrs. Grey's dining-room, and I may as well do it quietly as not."

"Is the improvement of your pupils no object to you?"

"Yes; but it would not conduce to their improvement, I fancy, if I stormed and protested. Only fancy the result," Margaret said, with a touch of her old humour breaking out: "Miss Grey would regard me with a look of unutterable surprise; Ellen would laugh; Mrs. Grey would come to the rescue with a torrent of eloquence my poor efforts could never stem, and if I meant to preserve my dignity, I should have to wish them good morning, and lose my occupation."

"No great loss, I should think," muttered Mr. Iliffe.

"That depends on circumstances; to me it would be a great one."

Mr. Iliffe was silent: if she would give him her

confidence, he would be only too glad to receive it; but if she wished to withhold it, he had no right to be curious.

" You will pardon me, Miss Hall," he said presently, " but I have noticed you are fond of flowers; I thought these fine when I saw them; may I offer them to you ? "

He hardly thought she would take them; he had seen her repulse kind offers, and shrink from civilities, and it pleased him to see her face brighten as she took them and thanked him.

" They seem like old friends," she remarked, as she touched them tenderly.

" I am glad they please you," said Mr. Iliffe, simply. He was not a very young man, and had a grave, preoccupied appearance that may have made him seem older than he really was, and a quiet, earnest way of speaking. " You are glad to see old friends again, then," he added; " indeed, I think it is pleasant to all of us."

" It depends on the associations they bring back with them; we find the remembrance agreeable or not, as our memory clothes them. In my case I oblige myself to forget, lest I should become still more disgusted with the present."

" But if the past was happy, why forget it? We

so seldom recognize happiness as being directly with us, that half our enjoyment exists in looking forward to happiness, or recalling it, as once with us. Ah, Miss Hall, don't think me inquisitive, but you have not always taught music?"

"No."

"I knew your father, Miss Hall; though you I never saw till lately."

Margaret raised her head, looking at him somewhat defiantly. Of late she had been accustomed to hear her father spoken of by those around her as improvident, extravagant, and heedless, and she fancied he would say the same.

"Well, sir," she demanded.

He met the indignant eyes, and knew what she felt.

"He was very dear to me; I have received such kindness at his hand, that I can never forget. As a boy I honoured and reverenced him, as a man I loved and honoured him still."

Margaret felt the tears in her eyes; it was so inexpressibly dear to hear him spoken kindly of. She noticed, too, for the first time that Mr. Iliffe wore mourning.

"You, too, have lost a relative, or a friend?"

"I have lost your father."

“Thank you, Mr. Iliffe;” she was more grateful for that one morsel of reverence paid to the dead, than she could have felt for a host of benefits to the living.

“Have I now sufficient claim to be called a friend?” he asked presently.

“Oh, yes,” was the frank answer; they were near her home by this time, and she gave him her hand. Perhaps it may have been his intention to investigate and become acquainted with that same home of hers, and its inmates; but as she seemed not to wish it, he accepted the signal of parting, and went his way alone. Margaret was following the train of recollections so unexpectedly started. What a length of time it seemed; yet only six months had elapsed since her father’s death. In six little months lay the heart-breaking, the despair, the struggle. Before such wild grief as Margaret’s when she reached her home and found there the desolation of which the messenger had not been able to tell her, I, her biographer, stand back abashed. To me, great sorrow is always sacred; it seems sacrilege to note down the wild gestures and reckless words falling from the lips of those lately bereaved. I would rather humbly bow my own head before the great Dispenser of joy and sorrow, close the door, and let the poor bursting

heart seek a higher comfort and sympathy than we sons of dust can offer. We may be sure that the moment grief seeks consolation from our sympathy it has already lost its first poignancy and is partly healed. It is as with prayer : in every-day life it is sufficient that we pray publicly, but when some bitter draught has to be drained, when some sudden blow takes from us all we held dear in life, and we need heavenly comfort indeed, we seek our closet, pour out our anguish unseen and alone, and think we draw closer to God.

When the trouble was generally known, and the first week of mourning past, it became necessary for some one to look into matters. Mr. Edward Fawton, Mrs. Hall's brother, took their affairs into his hands, went over everything in a businesslike manner, furnished a small cheap house in Manchester with some of the plainest things from Prestwich, and removed the family there ; he put up to auction the remaining furniture, pictures, and books (except, indeed, such few as Margaret insisted on taking with her as being most closely associated with her father), realized their value, paid off the creditors, and invested what remained in some small safe property yielding to the widow a yearly income of fifty-five pounds ; congratulating himself that by

these means he insured himself from ever being burdened by her and her family, and gave her no chance of incurring future beggary by reckless extravagance in the present.

Mrs. Hall acquiesced in all he suggested; and though Margaret was too stunned by her loss to notice, or indeed care, much what he was doing, she certainly did make some little protestation about the smallness of the sum; but was instantly silenced and put down by her uncle in a very masterly and businesslike manner.

As regarded Mr. Pilliger, it was found on investigation, that Mr. Wills had been wrong in representing that gentleman as having decamped with the whole of the capital he had obtained. Some little he may certainly have kept back, with a wise foresight of possible rainy days; but the greater portion, it was ascertained, he had most undoubtedly invested as he represented at the time to Mr. Hall; on the speculation proving to be a mere swindle, in which he had been duped as well as his client, he had decamped with what he had in hand: as much, most likely, to escape Mr. Hall's wrath, as from a consciousness that his own proceedings would not bear strict investigation.

When the Halls had settled down in their house,

it very soon became apparent to Margaret that fifty pounds would not cover their house expenses, and leave them straight at the end of the year; and she set herself to devise some means of increasing their poor little income. For when some great affliction comes to us, it is curious how trivial the smaller evils of life appear; how calmly we look forward to them, how quietly bear them. Margaret Hall, bred up in luxury and wealth, never having dreamed of poverty as an evil likely to befall her, yet took this part of the misfortune with what her mother considered the most provoking calmness. It seemed as though all her regrets had been poured on the other trouble, and that for this evil she had none left. As the house was larger than they positively required, letting lodgings was the first idea, and Margaret considered, as it was near the town, that they would have no particular difficulty in getting a respectable tenant. Mrs. Hall was horrified at the idea. A Fawton a lodging-house keeper! great heaven! what would Margaret think of next. A fit of hysterics followed the horror, and then an agitated call on her brother, entreating him to use his influence with Margaret and persuade her to change her degrading intention.

But Mr. Fawton, as a man of business, could not

fail to see that Margaret was right. Clearly fifty pounds a year was not sufficient to live on: it was a great fall certainly, as Fanny said; but the things of this world were so uncertain, and the hard-earned crust of independence was sweeter than the luxurious table of dependence, &c. &c. Mr. Fawton, standing on the soft hearth-rug in his fine drawing-room, could talk in a most edifying manner, admiring himself meanwhile in the large pier-glass prodigiously; but the fine sentiments and long words could bring little comfort to the poor widow, feeling now for the first time how our rich friends regard us when we are rich no longer, and sending her forth with bitter tears upon her pale face. So Margaret had her way, and they advertised the front sitting and bed room as eligible apartments to be let.

Whether they were too inexperienced, or were too eager for tenants, or whether it was a business totally unsuited to those not accustomed to take count of pence and shillings, I cannot say; but certain it is that they failed most signally in the venture. They first got into the rooms a medical student, who, after leading them an anxious riotous life for five weeks, went off one morning with his carpet-bag and never returned to pay the three

weeks' board and lodging he owed; and next a lady, who, after bating down their terms, so as to leave the very smallest margin of profit possible, and requiring all sorts of additions and alterations made in the arrangements of carpets, curtains, &c., discovered at the end of a fortnight that the place was "too quiet," and insisted on going without the usual notice, on the plea that the situation had not been properly represented to her when she took the rooms.

This carried them into the fourth month. When the medical student was gone, Margaret, determined to save, if she could not earn, turned away the young servant they had engaged, and did the house work herself: a piece of economy her mother resented deeply at first, till she saw how kindly Margaret took to it, and with what easy indifference she rolled up her cuffs and lit fires, swept rooms, and peeled potatoes; when she reconciled herself by remembering that Margaret had always been her father's child, and, being troubled with no aristocratic blood, could turn her hand to anything when once convinced of the necessity of so doing.

It was upon the departure of the female lodger, and when it seemed probable that the little card hung in the window, signifying to all passers-by

that there were apartments to spare inside, would remain there for some time without procuring an applicant, that it first occurred to Margaret she might perhaps make some use of her knowledge of music; and as this met with no particular objection on the part of Mrs. Hall, she applied herself sedulously to the task of finding some one in want of that useful commodity, a music teacher.

CHAPTER II.

OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

HAVING resolved on this course, Margaret began to look out for some engagement, and seeing an advertisement one morning in the newspaper for a female music teacher, consulted her mother as to the propriety of applying for the engagement.

That lady, so consulted, looked up for a moment from her embroidery to say, “I don’t know really, Margaret: as your uncle thinks best, perhaps you may as well apply; but really it seems useless to me, and you might as well stop at home for all the good you will do out. But do just as you like: don’t let me dissuade you; and really—there I’ve dropped a stitch, and shall have to unravel ever so much! Do stand out of the light, Margaret, for goodness’ sake, while I see if I can pick it up again.” With this permission, Margaret went upstairs to prepare to go out.

Now that she was going among strangers,

Margaret, standing before her glass, remembered, almost for the first time since her trouble, to look at her face and notice the effect the last few months had had on it. Not so much, certainly; she thought it looked older perhaps, and paler, but taking down her dark hair from the plain, tight manner in which she had worn it of late, and letting it fall into its old thick curls, she smiled at recognizing the face she had used to know, as she might have done an old friend. Perhaps with the recognition came back the heartache that she had called selfish and condemned to be henceforward no part of her life. Where was Frank? Had he heard of her trouble, and did he care? She said not: she said he had never cared for her, and looked at the reflection of her own face while she said it, and would not heed the pain. God knows he had done wrong to deceive a love like hers; but it was past, and they might never meet, their paths lay so differently now: God grant her strength to keep straight in hers!

She put on her best black dress, and smoothed her hair in its plain folds again underneath her crape bonnet. "No lady will object to me on the score of too much beauty," she said, looking at her straight, ponderous eyebrows that seemed thicker and darker than ever.

No. 4, Montpellier Terrace, was situated in one of those numberless streets that were just then springing up so thickly about Green Heys. They were smart, new-looking houses, small and shallow in appearance, and looking as though they did not at all necessitate the tenant's being a man of substance, or even being possessed of many earthly goods to enable him to occupy them. They were trim, and bright with paint and colour, yet their aspect was that of general freedom from responsibility; such a here-to-day and gone-to-morrow appearance, that had any one tenant been my debtor, the very appearance of the house would have induced me to keep a keen look-out as to his general movements.

"Not very promising," thought Margaret, when she found the house, and went up the gravel walk.

A remarkably dirty servant-girl answered her ring at the door, and Margaret having ascertained that the lady of the house was in, sent in her name, and was shown into the front room. It was very untidy; papers and picture-frames were scattered about everywhere, and there was a greater scarcity of chairs and tables than anything else. On the table, among other things, was a glass of beer, and before the fire sat a gentleman in a dressing-gown, with a

leg on either hob, reading the paper. He turned his head with languid indifference as Margaret entered, but, catching sight of her face, started up so energetically as to leave a portion of the dressing-gown clinging to a nail that obtruded from the leg of the chair.

"By Jove! Miss Hall," he exclaimed.

Margaret recognized him, and was almost equally surprised to see Mr. Wills. That gentleman threw himself back in his chair. "Quite startled me; by George, you did," and fanned himself with a dirty handkerchief he extracted from some part of his voluminous costume.

Mr. Wills was never good-looking; he had a broad shallow face, a low brow, bold prominent eyes, and thick lips; but now, unwashed and unshaven, he appeared disgusting. Margaret felt her face colour at the lengthened stare with which he honoured her.

"Very sad affair," he said at last, alluding to Mr. Hall's death. "Ah, he was always too confiding in others, and never was very sharp in business matters."

Mr. Wills' comment reminded Margaret of the living cur moralizing on the dead lion. In life her father had not had a more deferential follower than

this man, and had disliked him because he affected such humility to him.

" You came to see my wife, I believe ? "

" Yes."

" Ha ! by Heaven ! a strange coincidence," after which he resumed his beer and paper.

Presently Mrs. Wills appeared, handsomely dressed and quite sparkling in the jewellery way, but with an appearance of having assumed all these splendours in a great hurry and completed some portions of her toilet in her passage from the dressing-room to the ground floor, from the fact of their looking very much awry. She was stouter and redder than ever, and a good deal of the colour had taken up a permanent residence on her nose, which did not improve her appearance.

" My dear, Miss Hall : Miss Hall, Mrs. Wills," said Mr. Benjamin, with a magnificent flourish of his hand and handkerchief.

Mr. Wills, with his head on one side, studied the tall, darkly clad figure before him.

" Any relation to your old friend, Benjamin ? "

" Daughter !" replied Mr. Wills, triumphantly. " Mrs. Wills, I admire you : I'm proud of you ! I'm proud of any woman who has a good memory for anything beyond the amount of her milliner's bill.

You have proved not only a solace and a comfort to me, but an actual saving: the moment I led you to the hymeneal altar, Mrs. Wills, pocket and memorandum books became an unnecessary expenditure!"

It was difficult to discern whether this compliment was pleasing to the lady to whom it was addressed or not, for she only said, "Bother!" and turned to Margaret.

" You apply in consequence of my advertisement, I presume?"

" Yes."

" You are, of course, fully competent to teach the piano in every stage?" said the lady, magnificently.

" I studied under very good masters, Mrs. Wills; and think, unless your daughters are already very proficient, I should be quite competent to teach them for a time."

" For a time, certainly; of course later they must have masters themselves, they are only young at present: the eldest is ten."

" Gad, I should think not!" put in Mr. Wills, who was watching them. "Mrs. Wills is quite a young woman: a girl, by Jove! Don't you think so, Miss Hall?"

" Benjamin! how can you be so silly?" said the lady, with a simper.

"Silly! Ask Miss Hall if I'm silly. Quite a girl I swear: quite a girl."

"And as regards references," resumed Mrs. Wills, "you are, of course, prepared to show those, as a guarantee of your competency?"

Whether that lady supposed Margaret carried about with her a number of acknowledgments of her talents, as quack doctors advertise their "testimonials," is uncertain; but she flattered herself she was doing things in a businesslike manner by asking.

"References," repeated Margaret. "I have never taught before, Mrs. Wills."

"Indeed," said that lady, so drily that Margaret felt she had made a fatal admission. The attentive Mr. Wills, however, came gallantly to the rescue.

"References! ha, ha! bravo, Mrs. Wills! born for business! I'll be Miss Hall's reference, my dear. When Mrs. Wills asks you that question again, just refer her to me."

"Benjamin, I must really request you to mind your affairs. This engagement is my business."

"Your business, my love; on the contrary, I am connected with Miss Hall both in friendship and business. Her father loved me like a brother, and kept my portrait in his dining-room."

Margaret turned round in her old hasty manner and contradicted Mr. Wills' last statement; softening her assertions a moment after by saying, at least she had never seen it there.

"Of course not, my dear: you didn't know it, or your father either, I dare say. Do you remember the large historical picture over the sideboard? I sat for the principal figure: the picture went into the world and your father got it; and the other day when it was put up to auction, the auctioneer (damn his impertinence!) cried out, 'Look round, gentlemen, and you'll see the original of this striking face.' Everybody turned and saw me! the fellow thought I should be abashed; but I made the company a polite bow, stepped forward, outbid the last bidder, and got the picture."

He concluded with a magnificent flourish of both hand and handkerchief, and Mrs. Wills returned to the subject on hand.

"I should like a little time to consider your proposition, Miss Hall," she said.

"Oh, certainly."

"This day week, then, if you will call, I shall be able to conclude the engagement one way or another."

Margaret rose, most perfectly acquiescent to this

open proceeding ; when Mr. Wills darted from his chair, and took up his position between them.

“ I can’t have this ! Priscilla, you like Miss Hall ; I like Miss Hall. Why defer the engagement ? By Heaven ! Mrs. Wills, you are unreasonable to keep anybody in a state of suspense for an entire week.”

Margaret entreated he would not disturb his wife’s arrangement for her sake, assuring him it would suit her perfectly ; but he was obstinate.

“ Mrs. Wills, the engagement is concluded. It is only left for you to fix the days. Miss Hall can instruct her pupils.”

Mrs. Wills knitted her brows, and did not deign a reply. Margaret had it at her tongue’s end to refuse the engagement altogether : she had wished that her past life might have been as little associated with her present one as possible ; but the prospect of getting no other engagement stopped her, and she left the interview to terminate as it might.

“ Come, Mrs. Wills, you know I never act without a reason ; I have a good one in the present instance. What days shall we say ? ”

“ Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I think will suit me best, then.”

“ Will that suit you, Miss Hall ? ”

“ Quite ; I have no other engagement.”

"We will consider it settled then."

"If Mrs. Wills is quite agreeable. I have no wish to—"

"Mrs. Wills is quite agreeable," said Mr. Wills.

That lady bowed assent: not very graciously though, it struck Margaret.

Miss Hall thought there was nothing more, and rose to go. Mrs. Wills thought there was nothing more; indeed, probably thought there had been a little too much already, and followed her example. Mr. Wills knew there was something more, but could not remember what it was just then; although he endeavoured to assist his mental faculties by striking his forehead a good deal with his large open hand, and followed Margaret to the door in a state of rueful perplexity for so composed a man.

Not considering it necessary to detain Miss Hall, however, until such time as his memory should prove subservient to his will, especially as he thought that might not occur till the following day, he bade her a courteous adieu, and suffered her to go.

On her way towards town, Margaret met two ladies coming in the opposite direction, who took up the entire pavement with their voluminous dresses, and having honoured the tall, darkly clad girl with a supercilious stare, moved slightly aside, and passed

on. Margaret's face flushed: there had not been the slightest token of recognition; she might have been the greatest stranger to them, for all they cared or would acknowledge her; and yet these were the women at whose house she had so often lived, and to whom she had been so nearly related—these were Frank's sisters. Margaret had not seen them since the night she had left their house; they had been out of town, and this was how they met their old friend. Perhaps they had thought it over beforehand, and settled in their own minds, and most probably to the perfect satisfaction of their tender consciences, that, considering Margaret's altered circumstances, and the painful associations with which they were connected, it would be only kindness to her as well as convenience to themselves, to put a stop to all further connection, and so had cut her: cut her as only a woman can, coolly and insolently. A man blusters over it, reddens and looks into a shop-window when an impoverished friend passes; but here the fair sex rise calm and superior, and go through their duty composedly and unflinchingly. Even though the person "cut" may be a dear friend, if the edict hath gone forth, and the world—or rather the smaller circle in which she moves—hath expelled her, she nobly hides the wounds the separation causes

under her silken cloak, goes forth, and does her duty.

Whether Margaret had as yet failed to realize fully her own altered position, or whether that absurd young woman was so ignorant of the rules of good society as to suppose that those who were her friends when rich would be so equally when poor, I do not know ; but the late little incident came so suddenly, that it almost startled her : she failed at first to see why and wherefore she had been “cut,” and, at length discovering it, laughed bitterly to herself as she trudged homewards.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW LODGER.

WHEN I prescribe hard work, a necessary curb on one's temper, a constant call upon self-possession, and a round of regular duties, I think I have discovered an almost infallible resource against despairing grief; if the constitution on which it is to work is of even average strength, and the mind equally included as diseased, is of ordinary equability. In danger of calling down upon my devoted head the anathemas of sentimentalists, I must protest against that long life of spun-out misery to which some love to condemn their favourites. Even though my heroine had many sorrows just then, the reader must not suppose she did not sometimes smile, or that my hero far away in Rhineland was so absorbed in his own regrets as to close his eyes upon beautiful scenery and reject what companionship offered. I am sorry to be obliged to confess this: I own to liking the old plan best, and do seriously incline

towards pale cheeks and melancholy eyes, towards rows of useless physic bottles and anxious friends, as the paraphernalia attendant on each love-stricken patient. And if they are not to be united at the end, as every right-minded reader will own that in this case they cannot, why, let them die, and we will have a black border round the last page.

Margaret Hall then, having found the labour, applied herself to it with right good will. Teaching music to two little girls just struggling with the notes, might not be very agreeable, neither was the pay very lucrative, yet it was far better than doing nothing; and when Mrs. Wills, before the first two months had passed, found engagements for her at two more houses, Margaret accepted them eagerly, as a means of independence.

About a week after her walk home with Mr. George Iliffe, on coming home from Mrs. Wills', Juliet announced with triumph that she was more clever than Margaret, for she had found a gentleman willing to take the front rooms.

“He is quite a gentleman,” the child cried, “and if mamma had told him the rent was twice what she said, I am sure he would not have made any objection.”

Juliet, in her impatience to communicate the news,

had made this announcement the instant she saw her sister at the front door. Margaret followed her into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Hall was sitting reading by the fire, with a thick shawl over her shoulders. It was a pleasant little room, plainly furnished, and looking out upon a little square of garden at the back, where a few simple spring flowers were peeping out, and where the early sunshine found its way.

"Shut the door, Margaret, it is so cold," said her mother, shivering.

"You are not well this morning, mother," Margaret said.

"I never shall be well while I am bothered so: I never was intended to be worried, and I can't bear it," said Mrs. Hall, crying weakly. "You must stop at home and see the people, Margaret; I can't."

Margaret stood back looking at her mother wearily. Stop at home! While she had been congratulating herself on her increase of work, her mother thought her absence selfishness; but she checked the feeling, remembering how weak and ailing her mother seemed.

"I am at home as much as I can be, mother: but who has been to annoy you this morning?"

"Mamma was dressing when the gentleman came

to see the rooms, and it put her about to come down and see him," explained Juliet.

"What did he say to the rooms, Ju?"

"Oh, he liked them very much, and said if you did not object, he would take them this day week."

"If I did not object? What does he know of me?"

"He said he had met you. Didn't he, mamma?"

"What is his name?" asked Margaret, wondering. Juliet searched on the mantelshelf for the visitor's card, and, finding it, gave it to her sister. The name on it was "Mr. George Iliffe." Margaret's face flushed. "You did not make the engagement, Juliet?" she said, looking up.

The girl tossed her long ringlets from her face.

"Indeed I did," she replied; "and he's coming, too."

"You should have waited till I knew of it," Margaret said quietly; "my time is so taken up now with teaching, that there are several things to be thought of before we have a gentleman in the house."

"Always the same; whatever we do, there is nothing right," broke in Mrs. Hall: "if we had turned him away, we should have been wrong, too. I'm sure there is no knowing what to do; and he wanting the rooms, too, so much, and saying he

hoped we wouldn't make a stranger of him, and offering such handsome terms, and an old friend of poor dear James's. Dear, dear, what shall I do with my poor head? and—and there's my book gone."

"Perhaps I am unreasonable," sighed poor Margaret, as she left the room and went upstairs. "Perhaps my boasted patience is but brittle, and I am, as my mother says, ill-tempered and unreasonable."

Bitterly and fiercely as Margaret might deny the feeling to herself, now that her first sorrow for her father had spent itself, there came stealing into her heart more bitter regret at Frank's faithlessness than she had hitherto felt. In all this desolation and friendlessness how dearly his love would have been cherished: how much more prized than formerly! She did him too much justice to suppose that poverty would have made any difference to him: rating and scorning him, as Margaret declared she did, she yet paid full homage to his good parts, found herself comparing him with the people she saw about her, and knew him, with all his faults, to be immeasurably superior. And then she indulged in her usual hard laugh against herself; as if she had caught herself at forbidden fancies—feeding on poisoned sweets.

And now for Mr. Iliffe. Why should she object to his taking up his abode under their roof? The money would ensure her mother more comfort, and it need not interfere with Margaret's own arrangements. So the mental consultation ended in his favour, and resulted in the engagement of the baker's daughter for a servant. At the terms offered, such a luxury was indispensable, and Mrs. Hall would be rendered once more happy by having some one to order about.

Mr. George Iliffe was a corresponding clerk at one of the largest warehouses in the town. He was a well-read and a travelled man, getting a good salary; but being without any very near kindred, and not on particularly good terms with his distant ones, he had hitherto lived in one of the usual Manchester lodging-houses; to him, therefore, the prospect of living at the Halls' was most pleasing.

Perhaps the certainty of seeing that morose music teacher every day was no small part of the inducement such a change offered; for such is the perversity of human nature that he had a fancy for seeing that dark, tall figure as often as he could, and liked to fancy the somewhat grave and melancholy face relax and lighten up at the home fireside.

Of course his friend Miss Grey had taken care

very early in the acquaintance to inform him of the unfortunate circumstances of her music teacher, and doubtless on such points of her private history as the young lady may have learned from her friend Mrs. Wills.

Whether it was so or not, Margaret chose to consider it most likely, and her coldness to Mr. Iliffe might be traced to that source. It galled her that he should hear a story she thought so degrading: she fancied when he looked at her—which during those lessons it must be confessed he very often did—he was thinking of her with pity, pitied her that the man she had loved had preferred some one else, and left his home to avoid their contemplated marriage. It did not sound well, certainly. They say pity is the next step to love; in angels it may be, but in our fellowmen it bears, to my thinking, a closer kinship to contempt. Margaret recoiled from the friendly feeling, if indeed it existed, and shrank within herself at the possibility of its approach.

It was this, then, that had constituted her sole objection to Mr. Iliffe becoming an inmate of their house; but it was only a selfish one at best, so she put it aside.

Let it not be supposed, however, that the gentleman in question had ever shown a symptom of such a

feeling ; his bearing to Margaret was always respectfully distant; and, except on the one occasion recorded, he had never touched at all upon her personal position. Quietly kind, and gravely observant, if he felt any more tenderly to her than he signified, he did not show it; not even the watchful Miss Grey could reasonably suppose it.

George Iliffe was no fool; if he hoped he could ever press his suit with success, he was determined that success should not be dependent on any feeling of pique Margaret might cherish against her former lover; and if she could ever like him, she would do so then, brought in constant contact with him. “If not,—if she can never like me,—if I have met too late in life the only woman I have ever seen whom I could respect and love,” George said as he put his things together in his old lodgings preparatory to leaving; “if Margaret is too great a prize for me; if she has still that love for the scoundrel who deceived her, why I have only tried to be kind to my old friend’s daughter, and I am no poorer that I have loved her, and known her; why I am no——” and here George left a blank.

CHAPTER IV.

A GENEROUS OFFER.

MR. GEORGE ILIFFE soon became thoroughly at home at No. 9, Howard Terrace. To Mrs. Hall he was a tremendous acquisition, being often content to leave his own room for the general parlour of an evening, and listen to that lady's conversation. He was an invaluable companion, listening with the utmost gravity night after night, not taking a very active part in the conversation, perhaps, but what was better, devoting to her his entire attention. What the inducement was, why he left his books and papers and took up his place on the opposite side of the fireplace with such unfailing regularity, why those delicate little gifts to the widow, I cannot say; unless to earn a still further right to the place, and see Margaret constantly?

One subject that he had much at heart he broached about two months after he had first taken up his abode there, and failed in totally; namely, a wish that

Margaret should discontinue giving lessons. He introduced it one evening, when the party was assembled in the little sitting-room. Mrs. Hall was reading in a desultory, idle way, some book he had brought in with him, Juliet was deeply engaged in working an elaborate sample in divers coloured wools, and Margaret was at the table sewing; for she was seldom idle now; to be at work was to be less restless and less unhappy; industry had grown a habit with her of late; and still retaining her dislike to all fancy useless work, was generally to be found when at home in the midst of yards of white calico stitching away.

"Miss Hall, how many mornings in the week are you engaged now?" began Mr. Iliffe, between the puffs from his cigar.

"Every morning except Saturday."

"And Tuesday afternoon as well?"

"Yes."

"Do you like it? Are you fond of teaching?"

Margaret looked up; it was very seldom he addressed his conversation to her.

"I hardly know," she said, "I don't think I do. It is something on hand, certainly; but it is a great nuisance at times."

"Then why go on with it?"

The question was bluntly put, and while Mrs. Hall was preparing some elegantly indefinite reason, through the obscurity of which, poverty might very faintly gleam, Margaret shocked her mother's sense of propriety in a most horrible manner by replying as frankly,

"Why do I teach? For the same reason I suppose that half the working population follow their trade; not through love of it, or any philanthropic notion that the world will be much benefited by it, but simply because I am paid for it."

"But if—if the money were no object. Would you continue it?"

"The money is an object—*the* object."

"If your mother were to show you that that object is not so important as you think it, would you give it up?"

"Such a thing could not be," Margaret said, speaking a little hurriedly, and bending over her work. "You are supposing impossibilities;—an occupation always useless, sometimes hurtful."

"No, Miss Hall, I am not. Give me your word, and I will guarantee to show you the rest."

She gave him a quick questioning look as he sat half turned from her. Juliet got up for some more wools, and he waited till she was gone.

"I want to know why I may not pay the debt I owe your father; why, Mrs. Hall, the obligation must rest all on me," he said, earnestly; "and I may not save the daughters and wife of my old friend from any anxiety or care about money for the future."

"Mr. Iliffe was speaking to me about it a night or two back, Margaret," replied Mrs. Hall. "I told him of course we could not think of it, but he wished to settle a regular income on me, in consideration of some former transaction he had with poor dear James. I really don't know what it was, but if he says there is such an obligation existing, I suppose he is right. Mr. Hall was really so heedless about money there is no knowing at all; but still, such unequalled generosity in Mr. Iliffe in mentioning what under the circumstances I am sure would never have been claimed——"

"There's no such debt; there was no such transaction," broke in Margaret; "don't be misled, mother, by such a supposition; if anything passed between my father and Mr. Iliffe, it was simply in that kindness and generosity which he showed to every one he met. I am sure there was no such debt."

"You cannot expect me to produce an I O U, Miss Hall, or a bill, as the baker does," George

said, trying to speak lightly, "so as to make good my assertion."

"No, but I shall require a simple statement of facts; and, if it does lie in money, the figures," answered Margaret, firmly. "Can you tell me, Mr. Iliffe, that you owed my father such a debt that the—the creditors who took everything else we had, could have claimed?"

"Is there no debt but what can be summed up in pounds, shillings, and pence?" cried George, with emotion. "Does long and tried friendship stand for nothing, and are there no claims but those that would stand a legal examination? Do I owe your father nothing when I trace to him and his friendship everything I possess or ever shall possess? But for him, what I might be now, God knows! I cannot tell it all to you now, Miss Hall; but my position when young was unfortunate, might have been degrading but for your father's help; and yet, when I want to make some slight return, pride steps in, and simply because I am no blood relation, I may do nothing, worse than nothing! Is it fair?"

A short silence followed this outbreak, and then Margaret spoke gently, as though touched by this cherished remembrance of her father:

"We cannot take your offer, Mr. Iliffe, now, when

we are in strength and health; we ought not, and you must not press it on us. But it may not always be so, more trouble may come upon us, and then we will claim your aid. Meanwhile be our good friend——”

“But you will give up your teaching, Margaret; such slavery sickens me.”

“What, teaching dear Miss Grey!” cried Margaret, gaily. “No, Mr. Iliffe, let me go on with my work: don’t force your kindness on us, there is no knowing how soon we may need it.”

“And you will never ask any one else? I will claim it as a right to be first,” said George, jealously.

Margaret smiled bitterly. How those words recalled all gone by, for the moment perhaps forgotten.

“The first!” she repeated. “What other friend have we that we could ask, and not be refused?”

George started up.

“Is it so, Margaret?” Is there no one——” he began, and then stopped, thinking how plain his meaning must be. Was he Margaret’s only friend? Had she lost all hope, all thought, of another and a nearer one?

“No, Mr. Iliffe, no one,” put in Mrs. Hall; “poor Mr. Hall had no relatives, and mine—well, I had a great many a year or two back, but I don’t know

where they are all gone to. I have not seen their deaths—no, they can't be dead; but it is a fact, Mr. Iliffe, incredible as it may seem, that except just one or two, I've never heard a word of them since our misfortune!"

"Is it so strange, mother, that they should forget us now that we are poor?" said Margaret, with the somewhat questionable logic she had adopted of late.

"Just like you, Margaret. You fire up in a moment if anybody offers to do anything for us; though I am sure I don't for a moment desire that Mr. Iliffe should sacrifice himself in considering us, or that we should take advantage of his generosity, yet if nobody does do anything, you say they are mercenary, and only cared for us as long as we were rich."

"Margaret is very fond of quarrelling with her bread and butter," said Mr. George, joining in against her.

"Am I very ill-grained? Is there very much of the savage in my composition? I sometimes fancy there is," said Margaret, gathering up her work again, and setting to it with a pleasant smile upon her face that made George's heart beat faster. He had never seen her look as she did then, excited, flushed, almost happy.

CHAPTER V.

FOUND.

FINDING Esther Rueby resolute in her determination not to return to Mr. Miles's factory, Gilbert, resolved she should not be out of work, had exerted his influence and succeeded in getting work both for her and her father in one of the adjoining factories. Even then he did not allow himself to lose sight of her, and was continually to be seen escorting her home in the evening, and making himself otherwise agreeable to the sedate little spinner.

But Gilbert was unhappy in his mind ; there lay upon him a great weight—a failure. He had employed every means in his power, he had devoted time, money, and energy in the search, and yet had failed to discover the faintest trace of Mary.

Letter after letter came from Mr. Francis, as he moved from place to place, and gave his route in *case* Gilbert should succeed ; and every now and then

Gilbert was fain to send a line telling of his failures, and owning with contrition that he was unequal to the task he had undertaken. Once or twice in the past months, old Candy Miles had put the same question to him, in a short, abrupt fashion, as though he would have cut the words shortly off before he had half given them utterance. It was not a subject the old man liked: he had thought to make it all right with money—money would do anything; and behold! money had been refused! That was Esther's doing. Ordinarily quiet, and not asserting any authority beyond what was necessary, when her father seemed inclined to accept the monetary reparation—an offer of which came down from the master a day or two after the interview in the gallery—she burst into such an indignant protest, that her father, easily persuaded one way or the other, stood back aghast.

"If you can take it, father, I cannot," she said. "And I must go away from you. I will go back to our old home. I would sooner beg my bread from door to door, than live upon the price of—of shame!" And knowing she meant it, John finally gave in, and the master was balked in his generous designs.

When he heard it, he growled out a curse on the

messenger, and turned upon his heel with his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"Greater fools than I took 'em to be," he muttered. "Well, they won't get a second offer, that's all. If they expect to be pressed, they are mistaken, and must look out for themselves, as they are so precious good."

Some three months after, Esther was returning home from work in the evening, when a woman, who had been standing in the shadow of a wall, came forward and asked her name. Esther told her, looking at her, meanwhile, in some surprise.

"Can I speak to you a bit? I'm a stranger to you, but I have a message for you," the woman said, with some hesitation.

"A message for me?"

"Yes. You have a sister?"

Esther drew back a little, and scanned the woman still more closely. It was dark, but the light of a neighbouring shop was upon them, and Esther could make out that she was shabbily dressed in black, slight and small in person, and with a dingy widow's cap round her pinched, pale face.

"You have lost sight of her this good bit, now," she said, evidently hurt at Esther's want of enthusiasm. "Don't you want to know where she is?"

“What do you know of her?”

“I know where she is.”

“Is she — she near? Good God! can she be near!” cried Esther, with extreme terror.

“She’s not far off, that’s certain.”

Esther shrank back against the wall. Her mind was full, then, of intense dread lest Mary should come up to her; lest she was lurking about, and had only sent this woman to open the way, and insure attention. Learning she was near, she never doubted her former fears regarding her were only too true, and she put her hand across her eyes, that if Mary came up in the finery Esther’s imagination pictured her, she might not see her; she felt she could not look upon her face in such a guise of shame.

“What are you afraid of?” the woman said.

“Keep her away! Don’t let her come near me. I cannot, I will not see her!”

“You needn’t fear. Do you think she’s comin’ to you, then? She’ll never do that. You must go to her.”

“I go to her! Where is she? Is she ill? Why has she left us for so long?”

Esther poured out her questions in a most eager, excited manner.

"I'll tell you as we go along," the woman replied, drily.

"Where must we go to?"

Esther was scared at the strange message and meeting, and full of cruel doubts and suspicions.

"Mary sent me for you."

"I cannot go," cried Esther wildly. "Why do you speak so coolly? Do you know what Mary was, and how we loved and trusted her, and she deceived us? If she wants me, she must come to me, and I will see her alone; but I cannot follow you."

"Why not?"

The woman put the question so innocently, that Esther paused. Might not her suspicions and fears be leading her astray?

"Don't you think I'd lead you honest? Do you think Mary's come to harm? She's livin' with me, as honest as a baby."

"But all this time, where has she been?" Esther cried; "nearly three months now, and we have never seen her face. Where has she spent that time, and how has she lived, if she hasn't come to harm?"

"There's always work to be had for them as try; and as for livin', she's lived with me."

"With you! all the time! Ah, whoever you are, don't mislead me, don't tell me wrong, in God's mercy."

All Esther's self-possession was gone; she was grasping the woman's arm in her violent agitation, the words seemed to burn into her brain. *Mary innocent*; Mary working; still her sister. The woman, seeing her agitation, spoke more gently,—

"I'm a widow woman myself, and get my livin' as I best can with sewing, and when I found Mary three months ago, without friend or home, I offered her what I had myself, and we have lived together, and worked together since."

Esther burst into tears; she did not doubt the woman now, and the shame, the unhappiness, and the pain of the last three months seemed brushed away and put aside by those blessed words, "Mary is honest."

"Come, come, you mustn't break down. I thought first you were cold and hard, and didn't care; and that made me speak rather hasty and sudden. You'll come and see her now."

"Oh, yes."

Esther put her hand on Mrs. Strike's arm, repentant of her former mistrust, and eager—oh! so eager—to go with her now!

"So you doubted me, Esther, and thought I had not done honestly by your sister," Mrs. Strike said, as they went along.

"You must forgive me for that," Esther replied. "I did not know you, and I had made up my mind so entirely, that Mary must have come to harm, being so long away, that when you spoke of her — ; but I can scarcely believe it yet: tell me all about it; I must know all before I can credit my hearing, I think; it sounds so strange."

"Well, I'd used to know her some time back, when she was in service at Mr. Miles's. The housemaid there had used to give me her dresses to make, for I'm not Manchester born, and couldn't make up my mind to factory work until I should be obliged; and I've managed to get a good deal of work from poor folk, since my Tom died, and I've had to get my own livin', and when Mary 'd used to come to my place, I'd always a likin' for her; for though she was a little vain, like most girls, she had good heart under it. You remember the third night after you missed her, you were standing at your door with one of the children in your arms talking to the overlooker at Miles's factory?"

"Yes," said Esther, wondering.

"There's a piece of waste ground opposite your house, with the railway arches crossing over. Well, on that night, just then, as you stood talking at the door, Mary passed you, and you never knew her."

Esther drew a quick breath, as though startled.

"I remember, I remember; I saw a woman come across and go past. But how little, how could I think it was Mary?"

"More than that, after the overlooker left you, she stole back to look at her own home; and maybe, Esther, if you'd been there alone, she'd just have come in and put her arms round your neck, and told you all, and you'd have had her back; but her father had come in meantime, and you were speaking of her, and he cursed her, you know, and you stood by and never gainsayed him; you, that Mary loved so, and thought so much of, you hadn't a single loving word for her; and the poor wench was frightened and daredn't go in, and you shut the door, Esther, you shut her out!"

"Hush, hush! I have been wicked and cruel enough to doubt her so," cried poor Esther; "don't make me worse than I am. How should I have known she was near? I thought her many many miles away."

"So when her own kith and kin turned her out,"

Mrs. Strike went on, "she got up and went towards the town, with what intent, or want of intent, it frightens me to think. I was going home from taking some work, and I think it was marked out in providence that I should meet her just then; thank the Almighty I did. She was so miserable, and so wild-like, that I don't know what it might have come over her to do; for when I talked to her, she only laughed—such a ghastly, horrid laugh that was more like a sob, Esther, and said nobody cared for her, and she was going where she'd be a trouble to nobody, and they'd never hear of her again; and some day they'd know they'd judged her wrong, and that she wasn't as bad as they thought her. I made her sit down on a doorstep and tell me all about it, and tried to comfort her, and tell her it 'ud all come right; and at last I persuaded her to come home: and next morning she was more cheerful; but still the recollection of your unkindness seemed to weigh heavier on her than her own trouble even; for she kept saying, 'If Esther had only loved me, I shouldn't have cared; but it seems hard she should be so cruel to me.' As for the gentleman she went away with, she would hear no wrong of him; she was sure something had happened to him, or he'd never have left her as he did; and she was very restless and miserable, till,

about a week after, we heard he had been ill, and was better, and had gone away."

"But how could she have stayed with you and no one have known? I made so many inquiries."

"I live at a different part of the town, and people thought she was a niece of mine from the country; especially as I had a good bit of work on my hands just then, and Mary came in just right to help me; so they asked no questions."

"And Mr. Francis," said Esther; "how did she bear hearing he was gone? Does—did she care for him?"

"After a fashion she did; but to my thinking, a love that is so unequal in station, where one looks up to the other, and the other looks down, can never be like a good honest loving between two rich folks, or two poor ones. And when I told Mary what I'd heard about this Mr. Francis, she began crying, and said, 'He didn't love me as I thought he did: I thought he'd forget I was a servant and care for me as he did for Miss Hall; but he couldn't. Even when we went away he seemed excited and wild-like, but he scarce spoke a loving word to me, and I felt all along he was master, and I was only a servant, in spite of all. And he never spoke of marrying me,' she said, sobbing; 'and I'd thought to go back home

a lady, and make them all rich and happy, and not let Esther work any more ; but he never seemed to think of that, and was, I fancied, half sorry he'd brought me before we'd been an hour together. So I had it in my heart to ask him to let me go back ; only he seemed in such a hurry, and I thought it would be time enough when he came back at night, or he might change to me and be more loving, and mighn't regret what he'd done after all. But he wouldn't,' says she : 'I know he wouldn't now ; and if he had come back, we should never have been happy, and he would always have been thinking of Margaret Hall, and would have been ashamed of poor me ; so, perhaps, it's better as it is ; and he can come back and marry her and be happy, and forget all about me,' and the poor lass put her head on my lap, and cried so it made my heart ache to see her."

"But why didn't you let me know where she was before ?" asked Esther: "you would have saved us all a great deal of anxiety and unhappiness ; for we couldn't forget her, try as we might, and the grief has broken down my mother sadly."

"She wouldn't let me, after she'd heard all I'd got to tell her ; she made me promise I'd never let any of you know where she was ; says she,

‘They don’t care any more for me, they are ashamed of me, and I won’t be a disgrace to them,’ and every time since, when I’ve tried to persuade her, she’s looked up at me in the serious, grave way she’s got of late—something like you have, Esther—and said, ‘If you do, Mrs. Strike, I’ll go away, go where even you shan’t find me, and will never come back ;’ so I let it be, thinking she’d come round in time.”

“And now,” said Esther, with sudden terror, “does she know it now? Will she carry out her threat? Maybe we shan’t find her.”

“No, I should never have done it, without her first consenting; if she had never meant to do it. But last night when we were at work together over a frock that had to be finished, she seemed low-spirited and quiet, and at last she says without looking at me, ‘Mrs. Strike, if you could find Esther by herself to-morrow, I’d see her; on’y mind she must come alone;’ and this afternoon, though she wasn’t half so decided about it, she said she thought she shouldn’t mind; so when I knew it was about your time for coming from work, I came to meet you.”

“How far, far kinder you have been to her than her own relations! God forgive me for judging so unjustly!” Esther added solemnly, after a short pause.

They had been walking some distance by this, through streets and byways utterly unknown to Esther, but through which her companion found her way unhesitatingly. The factories were all closing, and the "hands" going to their homes, or stopping at the public, "while th' missis went for'ard to put things t' rights a bit." At length Mrs. Strike turned up a dark, narrow entry, and reaching the court at the end, knocked at one of the doors on the left-hand side.

Here they stood some time, having to wait while some one inside apparently too small to reach the latch, tried to lift it, but only succeeded in rattling it ineffectually.

"That you, Tibby?" asked Mrs. Strike, through the door.

"Yes, ma'am, and, please, mother's out," replied a particularly small voice.

"Get a chair and stand on it, if you can't lift the latch. She's only a little one," Mrs. Strike said, turning to Esther, while from the patterning on the bare floor inside, it was evident her instructions were being obeyed. "The mother is a poor widow, and has to leave the three little ones to get on as they best can while she goes out washing, and it's lonesome for them when I'm away."

"Do you live here, then?"

"Yes, I rent two of the top rooms; they are but little ones. There, Tibby, you've managed it; now take the chair away and let me come in."

It was a remarkably poor, bare kitchen into which they had gained admittance; there was scarcely anything in it, the only light being afforded by a single halfpenny candle, and what made it still more cheerless, there was no fire. Tibby was a very small child, and her movements were considerably impeded by the nursing of a remarkably big-headed baby, while another scarcely older stood on a stool at the window, looking blankly into the dark court.

"Why, Tibby, little woman, got no fire!" said Esther's guide cheerfully.

"No, please, Mrs. Strike, I had no coal. Mother said afore she went out, p'raps the man 'ud trust us wi' half a hundred, till she came home to-night, but he wouldn't, so—so I've had no fire all day."

"Well, well, don't cry; give me the baby, and I'll make you a fire, when I come down, I've got a little coal in my box I think. This way please," and she led the way upstairs, the baby in her arms, having changed by the transfer from a heavy lump of almost inanimate humanity, into a most

lively and crowing state of foolish babyhood, and engaging himself in pugilistic encounters with the kind shoulder over which he was leaning, and making the most alarming expressions of delight at Esther as she followed them upstairs.

"That's the door," Mrs. Strike said, stopping at one at the head of the stairs; and then, having ascertained that it was unfastened by a slight push, went down again, saying she thought Esther would rather go in alone.

Esther, left alone, stood for a moment before she entered; regret, remorse, happy anticipation, rushed upon her, and made her falter; and then, with trembling eagerness, she softly pushed the door half open; she wanted to catch a sight of her sister before she was herself seen; to look upon the dear face in repose, before it should be animated with the emotion of meeting. It was a small room with a table in the middle, upon which stood a candle with a long black wick rising high above the flame; no one had tended that candle for some time since, no one required its light; as this struck Esther, she came quickly into the room, and, with a hurried glance round, took in the emptiness and vacancy. Mary was not there!

A sickening feeling of terror came over Esther.

What did this mean? The chair drawn to the table with the unfinished work upon it, must have been occupied by the missing girl, but how lately? Esther went out upon the landing into a second room she had noticed, but that too was empty. Then she went downstairs into the kitchen. Mrs. Strike was on her knees before the grate making a fire.

"She's not there," Esther cried; "Mary is not upstairs."

Mrs. Strike started to her feet.

"Not there!"

"No; I've looked in both rooms."

The woman's face grew pale, and she put her hand to her head.

"What is it? What do you dread?" Esther cried.

"No, no, nothing. She will come back—she must come back."

"Have you no idea where she can have gone to? I must go and find her——"

"No, you must not. If she saw you coming she would hide till you'd passed. It is to avoid you that she must have left; she hadn't courage to face you maybe, and when you are gone she'll come back most likely."

CHAPTER VI.

HOME AGAIN!

EIGHT o'clock, and Esther not come home yet. Mrs. Rueby, dutifully engaged in preparing the evening meal, was lost in wonder at her non-appearance.

"Wonder where she's gone gaddin' to now, an' leavin' everythin' t' spoil i' this way," she said, crossly; and at length, the children being in bed and there remaining nothing for her to do till her daughter should return, she sat down in resignation to her knitting. Half an hour later she heard the latch lifted and the door opened. She was sitting with her face to the fire, and did not see the new comer, but concluding it was Esther began to fold up her knitting without turning.

"What o' earth makes thee so late, Esther? Here I've bin waitin' and waitin'—"

"It's—it's not Esther, mother," said the new-comer, speaking timidly, and half coming forward.

Mrs. Rueby dropped her knitting, and turned round sharply, with a little scream; seeing who was there, she staggered back.

“Good Lord Almighty—”

“Mother! mother! don’t you know me?” the girl cried, with her hands stretched out; “don’t turn from me, mother!—from your own child!”

Mrs. Rueby sank into a chair.

“Ah, my lass! my lass!”

“Oh, mother, I’m come home; come back to you! Won’t you kiss me, and tell me you are glad?”

“Eh? but where’s bin to all th’ time? Thee should ha’ come back at once, or not’t all; thee should ha—”

“No, no, mother, don’t judge me so harshly. I’ve got to no harm. I’ve been living close to you and working, only I hadn’t the courage to come and tell you. Esther knows it all; she has forgiven me by this, and is gone to look for me, but I couldn’t wait; I thought I’d rather come and see my mother first, and hear her say she forgives me. And you do, mother; you haven’t the heart to cast me out again.” All unconsciously Mary was using the very words she had heard her mother plead with for her that night she had crouched listening at the door.

But seeing that she had taken them away in her heart, had repeated them to herself on past lonely nights, it was no ways strange they should rise to her lips then; and as she said them, she knelt down at her mother's side, and put her arms round her. "Oh, mother, I'm come home—come home!" the girl repeated, wildly; and her mother, with a burst of tears, laid her head upon her shoulder.

"Eh, my lass, my lass! thee's should never ha left thee mother; thee's nearly broke my heart wi' thee goings on," sobbed Mrs. Rueby.

"I've been wretched, too; thee cast me out, and tried to forget me, and it was hard to bear."

"Na, na; I've none forgot thee, my lass; a mother's heart never forgets th' absent lamb. Thee doesn't know how often, when Esther an' thee father was at work, I've wished thee'd come up anyhows, an' anyways, on'y that I might jist set my eyes on thee face agin; an' I ha' stood at th' door, an' watched; an' prayed the Lord God 'ud jist put it i' thee heart to steal up an' say a word to thee poor old mother. But thee niver came; an' my heart is nigh broke wi' watchin' an' waitin', an' thee niver comin'."

"Oh, mother, kiss me now that I am come; let me know that you forgive me, and take me back."

"An' on'y to think it's come t' this, arter all !
an' me niver thinkin' I should ha' thee by me agin,
till I lay i' my coffin, an' then I thought thee 'ud
come an' kiss thee poor mother, that ha' loved thee
so, afore they'd put me under th' ground ; but not
afore, Mary, not afore."

"But I am come back, and will never go again ;
and we must be happy all together again, and we
will forget what has past. Look at me, mother, I'm
not altered."

Perhaps Mary wanted her mother's assurance that
she was not altered. That scared, wondering look
with which Mrs. Rueby had regarded her when
she first came in, had struck into the girl's heart,
and made her fancy, perhaps, she was changed more
than she herself could see. Mrs. Rueby passed her
hands over the girl's head, and, pushing back the
thick clustering hair, looked long and earnestly into
her upturned face, then shook her head.

"Thee looks older, Mary—much older ; thee's
quite a woman grow'd!"

Mary sighed involuntarily, and then looking round
the well-known kitchen, noticed little Tops lay in
a cradle in one corner, and went and bent over the
sleeping child.

"She's grown, ain't she ?" Mrs. Rueby said,

coming to her, and holding the candle up above, to let the light fall upon the rosy, sleeping face.

But as Mary bent, and put her lips to the fat, smudgy little hand that lay upon the coverlid, the door opened ; a quick, heavy tread came across to where she stood, and almost before she could turn and had recognized her father, he had laid a strong, heavy hand on her shoulder, and dragged her unresistingly away.

“ Arn’t thee ashamed to come an’ pollute a honest man’s home wi’ thee guilty touch ? Get out, I say ; an’ never let me see thee face agin ! ”

Mary, startled by the unexpected attack, stood for an instant stunned, ere she looked up at him standing above her, strong, passionate, and harsh. Mary had always dreaded her father, stood in awe of his violent bursts of passion, and she could not plead to him as she had done to her mother. She only raised her head, and looked up at him, helpless and afraid.

“ Oh, father ! father ! I’m not guilty ! ”

Her words only incensed him : what right had she to speak ? To urge a lie against what he knew was true ? She should rather have grovelled on the floor, stricken with remorse and shame ; and not have dared to face him ! Well, if she were

hardened in crime, so much the worse. And he shrieked out he was not her father; she had no right to call him so; he cast her out; she was no child of his. He poured down upon her, as she stood trembling before him, abuses, curses, accusations. It was a dreadful time, and the poor mother sat down and sobbed hysterically, without trying to stem the torrent. Suddenly, and in the midst, the unclosed door yielded to a push outside, and Esther came in. John stopped as he saw her, and she glanced rapidly from one to the other; then a short, tearful cry rose to her lips, and she darted to Mary, and clasped the trembling girl in her arms.

“Oh, my darling! my darling! come home at last!”

John Rueby cut short an angry exclamation, drew a long breath, expressive of astonishment, and then scratched his head in a most violent manner. Here was Esther, who’d been hardest of all on her sister, and of whose perfect agreement with his violent conduct he’d made sure of, hugging and loving her!

“Speak to him, Esther,” sobbed Mary, with her arms still round her sister, and with her head hid on Esther’s shoulder; “he won’t—won’t believe me. Tell him—him all; tell him you—forgive me, and—and I’m come back home!”

CHAPTER VII.

A LETTER.

A LETTER from England: from home! It had been detained by wind and weather, had been following its owner from place to place, was a fortnight old when he got it; but it was none the less eagerly read by the traveller for all that.

"MY DEAR SIR,—

"Manchester, March 1, 1840.

"It is now more than three months since you first gave into my hands the charge that has occupied me unceasingly ever since. I knew you will have been surprised that I could not sooner tell you I had been successful, and have perhaps thought that I have been negligent in my search, but I have not: my only fault has been, what I daresay often occurs, that I looked too far afield; what I wanted lay so close to my hand, that, I straining my eyes in the distance, never saw it.

"Even now I cannot lay claim to the discovery,

but must confess to my own blindness. You remember Esther Rueby, *her* sister. She does not work at our factory now, indeed I got her into Bilston's mill some time back ; but not thinking it wise to break with the family altogether, until things were more satisfactorily arranged, I have kept them continually in sight, and yesterday evening on my way home looked in as I past. Esther came to the door, but did not ask me in, and, I noticed, kept looking over her shoulder at somebody inside, when presently who should come up beside her, and stand half hidden in the doorway, but Mary herself.

"I was quite thrown back myself, and must have shown my surprise, for Mary's face blushed deep red, and she nestled closer to Esther. It was better than a hundred pounds to see those two together, whom no one would have thought anything could have brought close to one another again.

"'God bless you, Esther,' says I, for the thought of her forgiveness and goodness came upon me strongly then. But she told me hurriedly, I must not think well of her, for that she had been much to blame, and needed forgiveness herself for having dared to judge her sister so hardly ; and she put her arm round Mary while she spoke, and seemed quite to have taken her back into her old love and confidence.

“ Afterwards when Mary had gone in, Esther told what she had been doing and where she had been since they first missed her. After waiting two days at the hotel where you left her, she came back to Manchester on the third day, not hearing anything of you, and naturally went straight to her father's. But failing sufficient courage to go in, she stood at the door listening, and there hearing her father swear she should never come under his roof again, she stole away frightened, and on her way back met with a woman she had known before, went home with her, and has lived there since; till at length she took heart to go and see her mother, and the whole being explained she is now living with them as of old. As regards any reparation you may think due to Mary, my advice is that it should be left to your father. It will come better from him, I think, than you, and I explained what had occurred to him this morning.

“ Of this, however, of course you are the best judge; and if you will write me your wishes, I will endeavour to carry them out.

“ Yours, respectfully,

“ GILBERT FARREL.”

CHAPTER VIII.

RETURNED.

“ HALLO ! Gilbert, old boy ! how are you ? ”

“ Right glad to see you again, Mr. Francis.”

The two shook hands eagerly. They had met at the railway station.

“ You came to meet me, Gilbert ? ”

“ Yes, sir. I wasn’t like to miss the first chance of seeing you again.”

“ All right at home ? ”

“ Yes.”

Gilbert ran his eye over the other as he stood on the platform, and marked with pleasure, how altered and improved he looked to when Gilbert had last seen him. There was the boyish spring returned to his steps, and the quick brightness to his eyes. His face lit up with a smile as he met Gilbert’s inquiring looks.

“ You think I am altered ? ”

“ For the better, sir.”

"That's all right. Here I'll leave my luggage to call for, and we'll walk."

And they made their way out.

"I'm so glad to come back, Gilbert, you can't think. It's worth a thousand pounds to see your old face again," cried Frank, gleefully. "Now then, tell us the home news, and how you've been getting on in the world."

Gilbert set about to tell him everything in the true orthodox style, about healths, and deaths, and marriages, sayings and doings, and got interrupted half a dozen times before he was half through. But he never spoke of Margaret, nor the Ruebys. He felt he had no right, nor indeed any wish to hit upon either unless asked; and Mr. Francis, equally careful, avoided any question that might lead to either point. For the last four or five months they had been corresponding constantly about the one, had made arrangements, &c. by letter; but meeting, neither thought fit to mention it.

"It was very good of you to come and meet me, Gilbert," remarked Mr. Francis. "Did my father know I was coming?"

"Yes, sir; he said this morning he wished I would be at the station. They've company up at the house to-night, so I suppose he couldn't leave."

"Have they? By the way, Gilbert, what was that you spoke of in a letter or so back, about that confounded little prig, Augustus Charlton?"

"Only that he is up at the house a good deal now."

"What the deuce is he doing up there? My father must have altered since I saw him, if he has grown fond of young men's society."

"Perhaps he doesn't go up for the master's gratification," Gilbert replied, mischievously.

Besides a long-cherished dislike he had towards the gentleman in question, Mr. Francis, in spite of his liberal opinions, had a good deal of the John Bull character in the protection of the privacy of the family hearthstone, and therefore did not take very kindly to the present infringement.

"It seems to me, Gilbert, I was wanted home a bit sooner, if it was only to kick him out," he said with a growl.

Gilbert laughed.

"You mustn't talk of kicking, sir, he's a great favourite up there."

"Nonsense, my sisters have better taste."

"Indeed, sir, he walks with the ladies, and dines with the ladies, and sings to them."

"The deuce!"

"And if I were to repeat what the women say at the factory," pursued Gilbert, "I should tell you, sir, that you would have a brother-in-law soon."

Mr. Francis was stamping along, clattering his heels against the pavement in a rage, then suddenly he stopped to laugh.

"What foolery you are repeating, Gilbert," he said; "as if my father would countenance such a connection."

"Mr. Charlton is rich."

"Don't believe it."

It was Gilbert's turn to laugh now.

"Mr. Charlton is rich, and handsome, and plays the guitar."

"I dare say, an hereditary accomplishment; his father played in the street, I'll be bound," sneered Frank. "Where did you see him?"

"He comes down to the mill sometimes to wait to be taken up by the ladies to dine, and engages his time with examining the work-girls through his eye-glass as minutely as if they were curious fossil specimens, and occasionally patronizing me, about my work."

"Does he remember me?"

"Yes. It was only yesterday he inquired, 'If

really, 'pon my soul, Frank was still away, and when he was coming back.' "

" Ah, he is on the look out, no doubt, for me ; he knew I would turn him out when I came," said Frank.

" Well, you'll have a chance to-night, sir—he is up at the house."

" Glad to hear it."

Within a mile of home, they parted, and Gilbert returned to town.

It was a clear cold night, starlit and hushed. Reaching his own gate, Frank paused a moment looking round. Recalling the emotions that agitated him when he had last been there, he smiled to think of them now, when it seemed as if years had intervened, and brought with them their softening influence.

Rascals opened the door when he rang.

" Glad to see you home, sir," he said.

Mr. Francis nodded, and giving him his cloak and hat, passed on to the drawing-room door.

There were several people in the room, ladies and gentlemen, disporting themselves on ottomans and couches, and one gentleman, tall, slim, and elegant, with a guitar slung over his shoulder, was leaning over Miss Eliza Miles. " Mr. Augustus Charlton,'

thought Frank, singling him out instantly. Frank's entrance occasioned some little commotion, Eliza came and threw her arms round her brother with a little exclamation of delight at his return, and Miss Miles gave him two cold white fingers to shake. The rest of the company were former acquaintances, and received, and gave their greetings all in good time and order. We do these things well in society ; no hurry do we exhibit to shake an old friend's hand, no unnecessary warmth of grasp when the hands do meet. If our feelings are warm, do we not with exemplary fortitude restrain them, and merely permit a cold pressureless touch of the hand to express our welcome as it may ?

Mr. Augustus Charlton was a tall, well-made, exquisitely dressed young gentleman about twenty-six years old. Handsome he was not, at least, not eminently so, but he so thoroughly believed himself the Apollo of the age, that he generally convinced people that there was something extremely prepossessing in his appearance before they had been long in his society. He had a great deal of hair of a pleasant light colour, that seemed to have taken to heart the opinion that there could not be too much of a good thing, and so insisted on obtruding itself in every way possible, in flowing

whiskers, moustache, and imperial; and as for his hair and eyebrows, they were so extensive in themselves, and had such an inclination to spread, that one might reasonably have supposed a violent attachment existed between them, and that they meant ultimately to meet each other on the space between them, and so annihilate his low white brow altogether. On the whole, in spite of the most beautifully shaped nose, and the tiniest mouth of faint rosebud hue, his face wanted character and decision. He did not look exactly the sort of man you would appeal to for assistance in a difficulty, and indeed would as likely as not have stood upon the bank while you fought for life beneath him, and wondered how you could be so energetic. But his costume, his get up! We have described the man, but how portray a thing so exquisite as his dress? He had everything that was new, at least a day and a half before anyone else, his boots were the smallest and brightest, his gloves the most delicately tinted that Parisian artistes could turn out. He was a great favourite with the ladies, and had touched—I cannot say broken—many hearts in his time, in the easiest and most *nonchalant* manner in the world. But then it must be remembered, lest I should be accused of impugning the fair sex as too interested and easily influenced

by mere beauty of form, that he was rich, as well as beautiful, and that his wife would have a fine establishment as well as a handsome husband.

“ Been—aw—away long, Mr. Miles,” said this exquisite model for humanity generally, and doing Frank the honour to address him.

“ Yes, for some time.”

“ It is nearly five months since you went, Frank, is it not?” asked Eliza.

“ Somewhere about that time.”

“ Ah, ’gad, now really how funny, it is ’pon my soul, now; but you were always on the move when I had used to know you. Been to Jericho this time?”

“ No, not quite so far,” said Mr. Francis, gravely; and viewing the other’s frivolities of speech and expression with the most unmerited severity.

“ Ah, well, to Bath then, it’s all the same, at least so my aunt used to say when I encroached. ’Gad, Miss Eliza, had you ever an aunt, and didn’t she always condemn you to Bath?”

“ I do not remember, Mr. Charlton, but at any rate I have not as yet fulfilled my destiny, for I have never been there.”

“ Ah, it is a place to which we send any one who is too wicked or too useless for any other spot on the earth to hold them; old maids, and half pensioned

officers ; a sort of Botany Bay, to which society sends her superfluity ; and one may liken it to a purgatory on earth, where the presiding fiend is *ennui*."

" You do not offer much temptation to go there," said Miss Eliza, after the company had sufficiently admired the brilliancy of Mr. Charlton's similes.

" No ; if I recommended anybody to go but my direst enemy, begad, my remorse wouldn't allow me to sleep for picturing their misery."

" I am glad you have so much conscience. You have travelled, of course ? "

" Yes. It was the usual thing, so I did it. Went here and there, saw this and that, and, 'gad,—came home again. I can't understand, really now, the fun of leaving one's home to spoil one's digestion, see Roman churches, and all sorts of queer pictures, that everybody talks and writes such a deal about, that one knows as much without seeing them as he does when he has ; and as a climax, to be insulted by infernal foreign officials, whose powers of perception are so obscure as to subject a gentleman to the same delays and investigations as they would a bagman, begad ! "

" I interrupted the music, I think. Was Mr. Charlton about to favour us ? " put in Mr. Francis, very drily.

"No, really; I never sing now."

"Is that gone out of date too?" Frank said, with a sneer he took no trouble to conceal. "I have been so long out of society that I am apt to think old-fashioned accomplishments still obtain."

"Mr. Charlton was going to give us a serenade," somebody suggested.

A little more persuasion and that gentleman condescended with much the expression of a martyr at the stake, to oblige the company with the promised air; and when he had finished and was receiving the usual amount of admiration that invariably followed, and was awarded to, his vocal efforts, Mr. Francis took the opportunity of leaving the room. That ill-conditioned young man, finding the society of the drawing-room very little to his taste, was on the look-out for some likely to prove more so, and went to find his father in the gallery.

"I haven't been home half an hour," he said, with considerable disappointment in his tone, "and am tired of it already."

Mr. Benjamin Wills was alone in the gallery; he and the master had just had a dispute over a drawing; the latter was gone to fetch it out of his bed-room, to prove that he was right.

Mr. Francis went up to the fireplace, honouring

Mr. Wills with a stiff bow ; he had come to see his father alone, and was not pleased to find "more company" in the gallery too.

Mr. Wills had come forward in his most affluent manner ; indeed, his way of presenting his hand was so imposing and peculiar, that he seemed to fancy he was making you a personal present in doing so, and on the present occasion, the action being overlooked, he took great umbrage.

"Proud young devil ! " he muttered between his teeth, " I'll cut him though. Just returned home, Mr. Francis ? " he said.

" Yes."

Frank spoke without turning ; indeed, he was engaged in examining a curiously wrought tobacco-stand on the broad dark marble chimney-piece.

" You have been from home some time, I think ? "

" Yes."

" Do you find things much altered ? I always think after an absence it is curious to study how time has affected our friends, and their positions," pursued Mr. Wills, taking up his stand opposite the young man.

" Considering, Mr. Wills, that I have only been at home an hour at most, my chances of observation cannot be said to have been great."

" Truly, sir ; yet our friends generally collect in

as small a space as possible all the news of the days or weeks that we have been away, and pour it down upon us the moment we enter. That's Mrs. Wills' way. I haven't been in the house three minutes, before I've learnt everything that has taken place, from the amount of the last picture sale to the new servant engaged next door. Invaluable woman, Mrs. Wills, sir!"

"So I believe."

Frank's love for the sex was not complete enough to banish a slight sneer from his tone.

"You heard about poor James Hall before you left," said Mr. Wills, taking the mental whip, with which he was determined to avenge his injuries on the insolent young gentleman before him, in his hand at once.

"Yes, I did."

"A fearful thing for the family," he remarked, administering the first slash.

If his victim felt it, he took it without shrinking, and in silence; so Mr. Wills knotted the thong, and laid it on heavier. Like many another tyrant, he felt himself half defrauded of his rights, if his cruelty was endured without any apparent distress.

"If it had not been for the courage of the eldest girl, I don't know what would have become of them;

but, by Jove, six weeks after her father's death she comes to me, and asks me to employ her to teach our children. Of course, in such a case I could not refuse."

"I admire your liberality," the victim said, very drily.

"I'm not soft-hearted generally, but if I had been made of stone it would have touched me to see their home broken up, and Mrs. Hall, poor thing, taken away. But they must have been very extravagant; indeed at the sale, things that went almost for nothing, must have cost enormous prices. Jim Hall was bad enough, goodness knows, in that way; but I believe at home they were worse."

The heavy silver stand which Mr. Francis had held fell on the marble with a clang, as though the hand that held it had snatched itself away, stung beyond endurance, and the victim faced his persecutor.

"When a man falls, there are always plenty mean enough to speak ill of him. What right have you to go and haul over a gentleman's expenditure in this and that, and cavil because a shilling might have been saved there, and a pound spared here? Mr. Hall was a man of fortune."

"Well, I can only say it seems hard the family should be reduced to beggary after it all. It is,

of course, no matter to me. If I consulted my own interests, I should turn Margaret away to-morrow: indeed, Mrs. Wills is quite competent to teach her own children; but a feeling of charity restrains me."

When Mr. Wills dwelt on his own merits he was always pompous, and now looked particularly so. Poor Margaret, honestly earning the very small salary he paid her, had certainly no conception of the immense sacrifice he made in her favour.

"Miss Hall must be, indeed, reduced, to accept it," said Frank, thinking bitterly of the position, and picturing Margaret teaching this man's children.

Mr. Wills saw as plainly that his blows were felt as though the victim had cried out for mercy, and it gratified him. Not naturally an ill-disposed man, Mr. Wills had been wounded here on his most susceptible point, and revenge pleased him. "I have him there with his infernal pride: he'll shake hands the next time, I'll wager," he thought, watching the other, and counting every stroke that told upon him.

In the background stood Mr. Candy Miles; who having entered unnoticed by either, stood watching them.

"It is now about three months," continued Mr. Wills, "since Margaret Hall first came to

instruct my children, and Mrs. Wills since then has been able to secure engagements for her in two other families in the capacity of music teacher, so that things are not quite so bad as they might be: indeed, Mrs. Wills, by my desire, has quite interested herself in the matter, and been very energetic in the pursuit, as she is of course aware of Margaret's unfortunate position."

"Have you finished?" said Frank.

Mr. Wills bowed. The look of suppressed pain and rage on the young man's face contented him. Oh, yes, he had quite finished.

"There's one thing you've forgotten, Wills," the master said, coming forward quickly as he saw his son turn away. Frank held out his hand, he had not seen his father since his return.

"What do you allude to, sir?" inquired Mr. Wills, "I am not aware of having left anything unsaid that I ought to have said. Benjamin seldom does."

"Benjamin says a good deal more than he ought to say," said the master angrily; "and seldom troubles himself to tell the whole. I wish you'd leave the Halls alone, if you can keep your tongue from wagging quite so fast."

"What is it, father?" asked Frank, putting the question rather eagerly, considering his position.

"I only omitted what I thought might not be strictly agreeable," said Mr. Wills, stricken with sudden consideration. "It is not unnatural that Miss Hall should inspire affection. She's a deuced nice-looking girl, I never saw finer eyes."

"What do you mean?" shouted Frank, fired with certain impulses to do something violent.

"I decline to say, sir. I cannot betray Miss Hall's confidences."

"Confidences!" laughed Frank, half beside himself; "you shall say what you mean. I won't have your insinuations about a lady who——"

"Hallo, Franky, my lad, don't get in a passion," interrupted the master, who had a great dislike to any one displaying temper besides himself. "Maggie Hall's got a sweetheart; a clerk in some office or other in town; there's no harm in that, I suppose. Now then, Wills, drop the subject at once and for good. There's the supper-bell. Frank, you must want your supper."

"I'll follow you in," Mr. Francis said; and they left him, Mr. Candy Miles giving Mr. Wills a word of private advice concerning the late discussion, on their way to the supper-room. Frank stayed behind. Was it true what they said? Must he take everything Mr. Wills said for gospel truth? Had Margare

indeed so soon forgotten him, so entirely cast him aside? It was hard to think so, and he put it from him as false, and reasoned to himself that during his absence nothing had occurred that need make him swerve from the path he had determined to pursue, when he had used to think of coming home, far away.

CHAPTER IX.

FRANK IN POWER.

A WEEK after Frank's return he and his father had an explanation between themselves. During that explanation, the master expounded his former intention of giving his son "something to do;" and that young gentleman dwelling with equal determination on his resolution "to do something," the result of the interview was Frank's establishment as second master at the factory. Perhaps that result was not exactly what Frank might have wished, had he had his own choice, but he yielded to his father's desire, finding that old Candy had chalked out the plan he now proposed some time since, and only left it for him to accept; so he took the position almost without an objection, and looked forward to the daily routine of factory life with a composure and contentment that was quite philosophical.

In return for this obedience, which, perhaps he had scarcely expected, Mr. Candy Miles made his

son's position quite independent while he remained there. Frank drew a certain amount of income from the yearly returns, which fluctuated according to the profits, and so gave him an interest in the increase or diminution of trade. The master did not believe in disinterested energy. "Have an interest in the stake, let it be ever so small, and the game possesses an intensity of interest for you that a mere looker-on cannot feel," was his maxim ; so to ensure his attention he gave his son an interest in the trade. A few years hence, if Frank decided to remain a cotton master, there was the promise held out to him of standing on an equality in the mill with his father.

On these terms, then, Mr. Francis took up the reins of office, and assumed his position at the mill. At first he found a few practical consultations with Gilbert Farrel quite necessary, and when meditating any alteration, generally discussed its practicability with him over a pipe at his lodgings, before carrying it out.

Most likely he saw many things needing improvement that his father, used to them, and following in the general wake, failed to perceive—what to Frank's unpractised, unprejudiced eyes seemed glaring faults. But he thought it wiser to establish his authority there firmly, by allowing a little time to elapse

before he attempted any great infringement on the old rules. But, as might be naturally supposed, on the very first assumption of his new power, he fell foul of Mr. Grimmitt. The fact of their being within the same walls necessitated their disagreeing, and before long their intercourse became one of incessant warfare.

At first Grimmitt was subservient, and made a great show of humility, hoping to curry favour, but failing to do so, he assumed an almost defiant course of action. Mr. Francis was too young to be put over him, he said; he'd served the master for the last five or six years, and wasn't going to be put down in that way by a boy. He knew unless some actual charge could be brought against him, that he was pretty safe with the master, and that it would be a bold, strong hand that could uproot his stand there. Besides, Mr. Grimmitt was always in the right, or if ever he did err, it was in the extreme conscientiousness with which he protected his master's interests.

In his rounds about the factory one morning, Mr. Francis happened to be standing at one end of a room, watching the working of some piece of machinery that did not please him; while Mr. Grimmitt was not far off overlooking some "hands." Presently

he began to rate them in his loud, high-pitched tones, and Frank, looking up impatient of the noise, saw him raise a heavy leather strap he held in his hand, and strike the girl he had been most particularly addressing, a hard blow across the neck and shoulders. She took it sullenly, and shrank a little, as though expectant of a second blow, while the "hands" on either side not daring to interfere, or even appear to sympathize, plied their work with redoubled energy ; but Frank came up with his face flushing at the cowardice of the act. He had never seen a female "hand" struck before.

"How dare you strike that girl ?"

Mr. Grimmitt turned a little astonished. Frank repeated his question still more angrily.

"Because if I didn't, sir, we shouldn't have a bit of machinery that would work in the place. Look here, sir, can this work when it is clogged so ?"

The girl had been late that morning, and having missed the time allowed for the clearing of the waste cotton from the machines after the former day's labour, had begun working without doing it.

There was nothing to be said. Grimmitt was quite right as usual, machinery must be cleared, and the "hands" must do it. Yet Frank was by no means convinced that the brutality he had witnessed was

necessary, and besides found the look of triumph exhibited on the overlooker's face galling to bear.

"Come to my room, Grimmitt," Mr. Francis said, and strode on in that direction, the overlooker following at his heels.

Having gained his private room, Frank closed the door, and turned round and faced him.

"Give me that strap, Mr. Grimmitt."

Grimmitt's hands twitched nervously, but seemed to have no idea of complying with the request.

"Do you intend giving it to me at once, or not at all?"

"If you suppose, Mr. Francis, that I can keep the hands down without it, I tell you once for all that I can't do it."

"You must try, at any rate, Mr. Grimmitt. I will not have such brutality in the mill."

The overlooker was silent.

"Do you hear me?"

There was no reply, and in a moment the impetuous young fellow had sprung forward, caught the strap from his hand, and might have followed up the assault by laying it across the owner's back, but Grimmitt, seeing this, and a coward at heart, shrank back, and it was not in Frank's nature to strike so craven a creature. The young master laughed

instead, and, swinging the strap in his hand, seated himself at his high desk, whistling with insolent indifference. Frank could be as aggravating and rude as any one when he liked.

All the colour left Grummitt's face. Oh! for a moment's courage, for a moment's hearty, heedless passion, such as Grummitt had never in his life felt, to enable him to strike the lad down as he sat. But courage is innate; all his life he had been weighing chances, and he weighed them now, put the other's health, and youth, and strength, in the scale against his own feeble health, and vindictive hate, and found the probability of his being worsted too great.

" You shall hear of this, Frank Miles," he said, turning to the door with his whitened lips trembling, and his little vindictive eyes doubly bright.

Mr. Francis was not particularly affected by the threat.

" You can go, Grummitt," he answered, lightly.

The man drew a quick hurried breath, and made one step forward, as though goaded past bearance, and meditating a spring, but he slunk back again as Frank raised his eyes, and went from the room.

" It is a queer way to enforce one's authority," said Frank, gravely, " and make might, right. Perhaps it

is hardly the thing in a master, but that fellow won't do anything he doesn't like, unless one threatens to fall to. He must go, I can't stand him at all. If I had such men as Gilbert to deal with I would not mind being a cotton spinner all my life, but it sickens me to see the poor women struck; by Jove, I feel ashamed to stand by strong and a man and see it done, and it will take a good deal of forcible argument to convince me it is necessary. If they won't do their work turn them away, don't degrade oneself by striking them."

He wound up the strap in a coil and put it in his pocket.

"I wonder if Grummitt will get another," he said, with a laugh; "I almost wish he would, that I might have the pleasure of taking it off him."

A night or two after, Frank went up to Gilbert's lodging after work-time.

"I lit upon something this morning in a London paper that I want to ask you about," he began, taking his usual seat opposite Gilbert, beside the fire.

Gilbert waited to hear. Mr. Francis searched his pockets for the paper, indulging meanwhile in sundry slightly profane, and certainly premature, suppositions that he had left it at home, until he produced it.

"It is an extract from a pamphlet lately published by some chap," said Frank, "who has been down into our part of the country, poked his impudent nose into our factories, and written a true and particular account of the brutalities practised therein."

"They are always doing something of the sort, just to make themselves a name; they'd say anything," replied Gilbert, like a man too used to misrepresentation to be indignant about it.

"Ah! it is all very well, but I'll put a stop to the little game, and have him up for libel just to astonish him. I never saw such easy-going chaps as you manufacturers are; so that you can pay the hands, and keep up your banking account, all the world might be painting you the blackest of the black, and you would not care."

"They haven't used our name, have they, sir?" said Gilbert, suddenly interested.

"Haven't they? Just hear this," and Frank, having found the column he had been looking for proceeded to read:—

"Last of all we come to Mr. Candy Miles's mill, that certainly is for regulations and general order, perhaps the best. Still even here many lamentable facts came to my hearing, that sickened me 'with rage and anguish!'"

"I should recommend a little cotton wool to the gentleman, if his hearing troubles his digestion so," put in Gilbert, with mock gravity.

"Be quiet, can't you, while I convince you what sinner you are. 'Two cases which I select from several, and which by my own eyesight I proved to be only too true, I give as examples how much wretchedness is ruthlessly inflicted, and by what unfair advantages taken by the rich over the poor, even those manufacturers who stand highest among the operatives for humanity and kindness, rise to opulence and wealth. The first, Martha Ann Tay, a girl aged twenty-five, who having worked ten years at the mill, became ill and disqualified for work, has been thrown upon her family, consisting of a paralytic mother and two infants, for support and sustenance. As may be imagined, her condition through this is truly lamentable. As I entered the wretched dwelling, I was beset by the cries of the youngest children for bread, while their poor mother vainly tried to quiet their importunity. At my request the poor sufferer came down and explained her miserable state to me. If she could only get proper advice and medicine, and food to recruit her shattered strength, she thought she might be able to get back to work in a month

or so. But alas! how to procure these. She had worked at one mill for ten years, had conducted herself with the most perfect propriety and supported her mother, and on becoming disabled received *one pound* from her master, with an offer of another if she would leave the town within a week. My God, I thought as I passed awe-stricken from out of this abode of human misery, how long may the tyrants oppress thy people, how long may the strong and mighty on earth bow down to the dust the humble and weak? ”

“ We are the tyrants,” said Mr. Francis, stopping short, and looking up with an expression of grim pleasantry expressed on his face. “ It is on our devoted heads that the anathema is meant to fall. Pleasant, isn’t it? ”

“ Please to read on, sir; the man daren’t print such a deliberate lie as that without some foundation. There must be something in it, and he’s right in the name. I’d used to know Martha Tay; she worked under Grimmitt.”

“ The second case is that of George Thompson, a boy, who getting one of his legs crushed so as to render amputation above the knee necessary, found himself on coming out of the infirmary, in a perfectly destitute condition, and on attempting

to put his hand to some work beyond his strength he became ill, and on being taken back to the infirmary, ultimately died."

"In that case," interrupted Gilbert, excitedly, "I can speak, for on the accident occurring, the master spoke to me as to what we had better allow the boy, and I thought four shillings a week for the first six months, and then see if we could not get him to something, and Mr. Miles agreed to that, and said he should have it."

"If you can prove that, I have a clear case of libel against the fellow. Did you see the money paid?"

"No, it was not my office to do so, he was under Grummitt."

Mr. Francis stopped short. If Grummitt were in it, he would not answer for what had been done and what had not.

"Perhaps it never was paid," he said slowly, as the conviction came across him. "I'm of your opinion that the man dared not make such a statement without some foundation, and if it has had to go through Grummitt's hands, I can believe anything."

"I can easily ascertain, Mr. Francis. In the morning I'll go round by Martha Tay's. If the

man is right, there has been some underhand work of which I am sure your father is not aware, and if the money has been paid, and these people have been patchng up a story, just to get something out of that soft-headed chap, that's got nothing better to do than write about other people's affairs, why we shall know it at any rate."

Frank sat looking into the fire, in a contemplative mood, resting his elbows on his knees.

"No, I begin to think the parson is right," he repeated, "and I shall be cheated out of my action after all. But, by Jove, if Grummitt is in it, and has been introducing his double dealing between the hands and my father, I won't spare him an inch. I'll crush him so that it will take him a good many years to forget it."

"I suppose the gentleman speaks more hardly of the other mills, sir?"

"I haven't seen the pamphlet, itself, but from this extract, the brutalities practised seem awful. There wants a thorough reformation in the factory system, a clearing out of old abuses and nuisances, the thing would work all the better, and all the freer for it, and if no one works the cure, the evl itself will do it by becoming too outrageous to be borne."

"It may be right, sir, in that light, and it may lead to good in the end," Gilbert said, warmly; "but I don't think it is honest of a man to come with a civil face and hand, and after you've taken the trouble to go round the factory with him, and explain this and that, and fancy he is interested in what you are showing, to have him looking out for anything that may not just suit his fancy to turn about afterwards, and make the worst of, and write it in a public journal with your name stuck at the top as large as life. It is like a traitor coming into a camp, I think, and who, after being treated to the best, steals out and tells the enemy."

"Why, Gilbert, when King Alfred stole into the camp of Danes in disguise, they called it chivalrous," replied Frank, with a laugh.

"Perhaps if you risk your head to do wrong, then, and come off victoriously, it is right; but if you get into trouble, and lose your head, I'm thinking your own friends will be the first to say 'serve you right,'" persisted Gilbert: "but you see your inquisitive friend does not risk his head, or risk anything, except, perhaps, the good kicking I should administer, if I met him on our stairs again."

"Still, my lad, if we do wrong, we must be looked up; and if they cannot come in and look after us

one way, they must do it another. They assume the mask, because if they showed their real intention we should bar our gates against them. They cannot effect entrance by right of might; fancy a brigade of parsons or philanthropists besieging our gates, and crying out after the manner of the gentleman here, ‘Oppressed people, rise up against the tyrants that hold you down, strike them to the earth, and let us, thy true deliverers, come to the rescue.’ Why, the “hands” themselves would be the first to oppose their entrance and stone them; and their only resource would be to get out of the town as quickly as possible, and take their revenge by dwelling on the ingratitude instead of the wretched condition of the working classes.”

“ You think he is right then, Mr. Francis ? ”

“ No. I have a thorough sympathy with the object, though I object to the way of going about it. I think when you are treating for the benefit of the oppressed (I like the term so much), you should not fly straight in the teeth of the oppressors. For all you know, they may be as well inclined towards improvement, although at the onset it may cost them a little, as any philanthropists or meddling parsons ; but one manufacturer cannot afford to forfeit a single advantage, unless the others agree to do the same ;

one cannot raise the wages, and reduce the working hours ; all must do it or none. And again, I object to half-doing style that pamphleteer affects ; before he dared to publish that statement concerning those two unfortunate hands, he ought to have ascertained every particular of the case, and at least have laid the blame on the right person.”

CHAPTER X.

A MEETING.

SPRING had come, with alternate showers and bursts of glad sunshine, with long, dull, hopelessly wet days, and days of such genial warmth, that summer seemed to have come, and not been expected so soon. It was Tuesday afternoon (Mrs. Wills had altered her first selection of the lesson days), and Margaret, after a long tiring walk, was waiting in the back sitting-room, till her pupils should come down.

She had taken off her bonnet and shawl, and stood at the window looking out upon the garden, where the early flowers were breaking into blossom; the crocus showing its brilliant tint of orange and purple, and here and there a late root of snowdrops springing up in the untended flower-beds. The trees were bursting into leaves of the most delicate tender green, and above, was a bright blue sky flecked with white feathery clouds. The morning had been wet and stormy, and the afternoon had changed

with one of nature's most beautiful alternations, into all that was glad, and beautiful, and joyous.

Margaret standing thus, heard without listening, for she was thinking busily, a gentleman in the hall asking for Mr. Wills. He was not in, but expected every moment, the servant said; and on the caller intimating he would wait, she showed him into the room where Margaret was; for the very good reason that the front one was being cleaned; and as it was not often subjected to that performance, when it was touched upon at all, it had to be done thoroughly, and turned completely "inside out."

The door shut, and the servant gone, the gentleman stood for a moment irresolute, looking at the tall dark figure wearily leaning its head against the window frame. Strange emotions agitated him, and when his lips tried to form and articulate the dear familiar name, they trembled so that they gave no sound.

Suddenly, and while he yet hesitated, Margaret turned upon him, and could scarcely repress a shriek when she saw his face.

"Mr. Francis!"

"Margaret!"

He came forward scarcely less agitated than she,

and held out his hand. Margaret instinctively put hers in it. She thought it was not dignified to do so ; conjecturing how she should meet him if chance threw her in his way again, she had resolved the recognition should be the slightest in the world ; but few can count on the emotion that the sight of a face we have loved will occasion when suddenly brought before us.

“ We meet as friends, Margaret,” he said, still retaining her hand.

She shrank from him, without a word.

“ Margaret, so many things have happened since we parted, we could so little foresee events. Don’t turn away from me, I have looked forward to this meeting for so long.” He tried to take her hand again, but Margaret drew herself up.

“ Mr. Francis, the events of which you speak have so materially altered our positions, that further intercourse—further acquaintance is useless.”

“ No, no, that cannot be, I will not hear it, I—— they are coming in ; for God’s sake say, before we are disturbed, that you forgive me, that I may see you again——”

The door opened, and Mrs. Wills came in, with full haste to pay her court to the distinguished visitor. It was the first time Mr. Francis had

ever entered the dwelling,—how he knew the house was in itself a miracle,—and Mrs. Wills felt the honour was great, whatever might be the purpose of the visit. Perhaps if she had known the real one, the compliment would not have been so flattering.

“Mr. Miles, I believe,” she said, in her most gracious manner, while Miss Hall returned to the piano.

Frank bowed. Yes, he was Mr. Miles, and devoutly wished he had been anybody else, since the name had secured him the honour of the lady’s presence at that peculiar moment.

“I know your father very well,” continued Mrs. Wills, sweetly unconscious of what a nuisance her hearer thought her, and perhaps fancying (so delusive is female fancy at times) that the signs of agitation which Frank could hardly, and on so short a notice, repress, were due to her own magnificent apparition. She often said no one, seeing the house, and knowing Mr. Wills, would fancy she was his wife, and expect to see *her* there. Indeed, in her rustling silks and jewellery she was rather imposing in such a small house. “I know your father very well,” the lady resumed; “but you, Mr. Francis, have never condescended to call before. Indeed, my husband has so often spoken of you, that I have been a

little hurt you have never accompanied your father when he has dropped in upon us."

Dear reader, lest from this statement you may form a wrong notion of Mr. Candy Miles's choice of acquaintance, I must tell you that he had called at No. 4, Montpellier Place, twice; once to inform Mr. Wills that he was "a damned thief," for trying to impose a picture not genuine upon him, and secondly, to secure some bills Mr. Wills had promised as security for money lent, but which unfortunately he had forgotten to deliver. Still the wealthy cotton spinner had called, and on the strength of those calls, the butcher restrained asking for his account for a week at least, instead of every other day, as he had been doing just before.

While Mrs. Wills poured out her flattering chidings, her gracious invitations, and polite inquiries, Mr. Francis suddenly pulled up to a fact, and executed a resolution.

Margaret was often by necessity at Mrs. Wills's; if he did not meet her here, he could meet her nowhere. Instantly he paid the most entire attention to all the lady had to say, apologized for his former neglect, and (oh, arch deceiver!) dragged into court such a compliment, that he stood aghast at his own proficiency in the art he so seldom

practised. When the children appeared—very gorgeous in white frocks and sashes, with very shiny faces, more indicative, alas! of yellow soap than mirth, and very red eyes—who could be more flatteringly kind than Mr. Francis, who listen with more respectful interest to the detailed account of their dispositions, accomplishments, &c., afforded by their mother? How that lady regretted, with a mother's devotion, that Charlotte Ann was not a few years older, when she saw Frank take the child's hand and speak to her in his kind, comical way. He was naturally fond of children; so as he was not feigning interest on this point, my reader must forgive him the former deceit.

Things, in fact, were progressing in delightful order, and the music-teacher, forgotten or ignored, had taken up a book to appear less than ever to have any connection with, or knowledge of, the conversation, when Charlotte Ann, suddenly noticing her, called attention to her existence.

“Mamma, does Miss Hall know Mr. Francis Miles?” the child said. “Why don't you introduce her?”

The two names spoken of together, brought back into Mrs. Wills's mind the occurrence so unavoidably associated with them.

"Why, goodness gracious! you knew—that is, you saw Miss Hall before we came in?" she said, quite discomposed at the discovery.

"Yes, a few moments," and seeing Margaret rise hurriedly as if to go away, Frank said he could wait no longer for Mr. Wills, he had an engagement; and before Margaret could utter her intended excuse for that afternoon's lesson, he had made her a low bow, shaken hands with Mrs. Wills, and was gone.

The juvenile Wills had a long lesson that afternoon; their teacher kept them at it, as though she had a new lease of patience granted her. Repetition after repetition was insisted on, no carelessness, no mistakes were allowed. Charlotte Ann glanced up once or twice, at her teacher's flushed face as she stood over her, and struck the notes in fault in the child's performance, with a clear, determined touch. Margaret was fighting a battle with herself, with the rebellious feelings the late meeting had called into play, that urged her to reflection, that called for consideration, that wanted to be sifted and thought over. She shut her ears to the call, she drove away the wish, and tried to bend herself mind and soul to the work before her.

The two hours allotted for the lesson passed, a third was broken into—still no reprieve; till it was

growing dark, and the notes on the page before them were losing their distinctness, and the child, tired and impatient, set up a cry that she would learn no more, then Margaret turned away, and put on her bonnet and shawl to go.

Mrs. Wills, by no means an unkind woman at heart, and certainly gratified, though a little surprised, at the unusual time bestowed on her children that afternoon, would have had her, since it was so late, stay tea. She was sure she was tired, she had been standing all the time. But Margaret would not, she wanted to be off; she thanked the lady, kissed the children, and set out for her long, dark, dreary walk home, with a sort of savage enjoyment of the physical effort it necessitated.

CHAPTER XI.

MORE TROUBLE.

WHEN Margaret reached home, Juliet opened the door, and as the light of the lamp fell upon the girl's face, Margaret noticed it was stained with tears.

"Why, Juliet! what is the matter? Are you not well to-night?"

"Oh, Margaret, why didn't you come home sooner, instead of being so late?" the child said, bursting out crying, as she went along the hall into the little kitchen at the end.

Margaret closed the door, and followed her full of apprehension; seeing her mother's usual chair there empty, for when the servant girl was out they sometimes sat in the kitchen, her fears took some definite direction.

"Where is my mother?"

"Upstairs. Oh, Maggie, don't go up. She's very ill!"

"Ill!"

“She was taken ill in the street this afternoon, and a strange young woman brought her home in a car.”

“Why did you not send for me? Don’t cry, Juliet. Is she alone?”

“No; the young woman stayed with her. I was afraid of being left alone, and she was very kind, and mamma seemed quite to take to her.”

Margaret threw aside her bonnet, and went upstairs. Her mother’s door stood slightly open, and she could hear voices in the room; she pushed it wider open, and went quietly in. There was a faint, steady light burning on the dressing-table, and through the half-drawn curtains she could see her mother lying in the bed, and a female figure bending over the pillow, putting wet cloths upon her forehead. It was her mother that was speaking. Margaret knew the faint, querulous voice, fainter and weaker now.

“Oh, my head, my poor head! What shall I do? Oh, dear! what shall I do with my poor head?”

Margaret went round to the bedside, her mother did not notice her, but kept on with her weak plaint. The young woman rose, and Margaret taking her seat put her cold hand on her mother’s forehead.

“She is very feverish. Mother, dear mother,”

she said, gently ; “ I am come home, don’t you know me—Margaret ? ”

Mrs. Hall turned her feverishly bright eyes upon her, but there was no recognition in them, and she continued her querulous moaning. Margaret leant back a moment stunned by this new calamity, but she had nerved herself for action almost directly again.

“ My mother is very ill,” she said. “ How long has she been like this ? ”

“ Only this last half hour or so. Before, she was perfectly conscious.”

“ And where was she taken ill ? ”

“ In Market Street. There was a crowd round her, and as I recognized her I thought it best to get a car and bring her home.”

“ You recognized my mother ? I don’t remember you,” Margaret replied, looking into the kind face before her.

“ Most likely not, though I knew you, Miss Hall. I am Esther Rueby.”

The quick blood rushed into Margaret’s cheeks, dyeing them deeply. She had found Mary’s sister tending her mother. Esther, looking at her, saw the flush and guessed the cause, but both involuntarily felt this was no time for such feelings, and returned to the patient.

"We must have the surgeon, and I have no one to send. Would you mind going? I should not like to leave my mother again."

"No. I will go. Where does he live?"

Margaret gave her the direction, and Esther went down in her old quiet quick manner. Left alone, Margaret changed the wet cloths round her mother's head, and watched her fall into an uneasy sleep. Looking at her then with newly awakened fears, Margaret saw how thin and pinched her face had grown in the last month or two, and reproached herself for not having seen it before.

Poor mother! Margaret remembered how she had sometimes thought a little impatiently of her complaints, and not loved her as she should have done. "I thought in my selfish grief that it was only I who suffered," thought the girl, remorsefully, "and forgot how heavily it must lie on her. Oh, mother, mother!"

In the perfect stillness of the house, Margaret could hear an occasional sob from Juliet as she sat at the bottom of the stairs, and she left the bedside to call her up.

"Come in, Jully, she is asleep," and she put her arm round the child more caressingly than she was wont. Juliet shrank from her, and stole softly to the

bedside. Mrs. Hall had opened her eyes, and seeing her favourite daughter by her, knew her quite well. It gave Margaret a sharp pang to notice the difference. "How harsh I must have been that these two have clung together and left me out!" she thought, bitterly.

Soon after Esther returned, bringing Mr. Enfield with her. They came straight upstairs, and he came round to the bedside. Margaret stood near, watching him as he felt the patient's pulse, and asked the usual questions. This done he beckoned her to follow him downstairs.

"How long have you noticed this falling away?" he said, gravely; "your mother is much thinner and more feeble than when I saw her last."

Margaret was obliged to own that she had been so occupied of late as hardly to have noticed any change, except an increased irritability.

Mr. Enfield looked at her over his spectacles, and shook his head wisely.

"Ah! no doubt, no doubt. I am going straight home, Miss Hall, and I will send the medicine with directions at once, a draught the moment it comes, remember. Extreme quiet is also necessary. And she should not be left, I think. Have you any one to sit up to-night?"

"I shall sit up myself. Is it infectious, Dr. Enfield?" asked Margaret, thinking of Juliet.

"I really don't know that it is. The nerves have most to do with it, extreme irritation, but there is a good deal of fever,—yes, a good deal of fever."

"And you will call to-morrow morning, sir?"

"It shall be my first call, about half-past ten,—yes, about half-past ten."

He assumed his great-coat and wrapper, and Margaret showed him out. Listening as she came back at the foot of the stairs, and hearing all quiet above, she returned to the kitchen to put some fresh coal on the fire, and light a candle before she went up again.

Coming out of the yard with a shovel of coals in her hands, she found Mr. Iliffe had let himself in with his latch key, and was standing on the hearth.

"I have heard what is the matter, Miss Hall. I met the doctor on the steps. But we must bear it bravely," he said, looking at her.

"I must bear it bravely, you mean. You, Mr. Iliffe, must go."

He answered her in so determinated a tone, that it seemed as though he had anticipated this rebuff, and made up his mind to combat it.

"I refuse to go, Miss Hall. In short, I will not."

"I say you must, Mr. Iliffe. You have no right to be here even now, or to be talking to me, for fear of infection."

He came closer to her, perhaps to show how little he esteemed his own safety, and perhaps because he would have liked to have shared anything with her, even sickness.

"If you are tired of me, give me at least a lodger's right to a month's notice; by that time you will be all right again, please God; and I could go more easily. But don't send me away now you are in trouble."

"I was only thinking of your own safety," Margaret said.

"I know how strong you are, Margaret," he went on, earnestly, and as if he had not heard her. "I could not have seen you for so long, without knowing how little you need help beyond your own strong sense and courageous heart, but I cannot leave you now, Margaret, not now." He was bending over the fire, and the flickering light showed his face strongly agitated as by some emotion he was striving to suppress. "If I can be no help, at least I will be no trouble to you. I may stay, may I not?" he added, with that simplicity of word and tone, that Margaret always associated with him, but which always made her smile.

"I think it is foolish and wrong," she said, firmly; "but if you wish it so much, and don't mind the discomfort of a sick house, I shall be very glad to have you stay—very glad," she added, frankly, and thinking rather with dismay how she should have missed him at such a time.

"Thank you, Margaret." And taking up a candle, he strode into his own room.

When Margaret went upstairs she found Esther putting the room in order, moving about so softly, that a sick room might have been her province for years.

"You are very kind, Esther; I do not know how to thank you," said Margaret, as they stood on the landing.

Esther smiled gently.

"It will be necessary for some one to sit up. Will you let me do it? Perhaps I am more used to sickness than you are."

"But they will miss you at home."

"I can go and tell them, and come back directly. It is no unusual thing for me to be away at night. There is a good deal of sickness where we live, among the hands, and we take turns in watching them."

"But I have no claim upon you," Margaret argued,

going back to the old days when factory life was only a name to her, and thinking how strange it was to be brought in direct contact with it.

"You need me, that is sufficient claim, is it not?" Esther answered, with her quiet smile. "I shall not be long away," she added.

Mrs. Hall had fallen into a sleep with Juliet's hand in hers. Margaret occupied herself as long as she could with finishing what Esther had begun, and then had only to wait the coming of the draught as patiently as she might.

It is a curious office for a novice, that of watching in a sick room. First, perhaps, we begin to wonder what we are watching for, and if anything sudden should happen, what we should do. This is a supposition that allows of endless flights of imagination, each more or less fitted to the complaint under which our patient is suffering, and when we generally take the most violent phases as the most likely to occur.

Having settled this point, and in doing so, if we are of at all a nervous temperament, have wound ourselves up to a most unpleasant state of excited irritability, our thoughts refuse to be lulled to inertness, but travel farther afield in search of fresh matter to digest, and bring back old recollections,

probably most unsuited to our present position, but which insist on forcing themselves upon us, till we rouse ourselves, and think how slowly the clock goes, and whether it has stopped; then we fall to listening to its ticking, and shape the sound to two or three words, and pay the penalty for our indiscretion by hearing them repeated all the night afterwards. Then we listen to the passers-by; then we wonder what somebody else is doing; and then, finding we are falling back into the old train again, we wish the patient would want something, that we might feel we are doing some good in being there at all—and so the night wears on.

CHAPTER XII.

UNAPPRECIATED.

"You will have some one to help you in nursing your mother, Miss Hall?" Mr. Iliffe asked, before he went to business the next morning.

Margaret thought not, she would nurse her mother herself.

Mr. Iliffe said: "It is absurd; you will make yourself ill."

"Esther will come when she can: besides I have Sarah, so I shall not be alone, you see, and have plenty of help."

"They are no help. Let me get you a regular nurse. I think I can remember one; or I can ask Mrs. Grey——"

"I will not have her if she comes. I am prejudiced against all professional nurses," answered Margaret.

"I think you are prejudiced against everything I propose, before I speak," Mr. Iliffe said.

"No, I am not, indeed; I appreciate your offer; but anything rather than a professional nurse. You would not like one yourself, now confess, Mr. Iliffe?"

George was posed; no, he should not; but then he said it would be different if he engaged a nurse to come and kill him, she would have it all her own way, with no one to interfere, and do it in her own time, but then with Margaret to look after her in the present case it would be different.

Margaret would not see it in that light, and obstinately refused the proffered help; but George was not to be put off—at any rate, did not seem in any hurry to abandon the seat he had taken on the corner of the kitchen dresser, when he first came in to make his proposition, and from whence he was watching Miss Hall put the little tray ready for her mother's breakfast. Mrs. Hall had spent a comparatively easy night, and was better than they had expected she would be.

"I tell you what I will do, then: I will waylay that sedate-looking little personage that startled me so when I met her on the stairs last night; I'll waylay her, lay violent hands upon her, and force her to listen to what I have got to say. I'll offer my hand and fortune—— What are you looking at, Miss Hall?"

"I don't think that would tempt Esther," Margaret said.

"What, the hand? Well, she should have the fortune, then, without. I will pour gold into her lap, and bid her give up whatever occupation she may be following at the present moment, and come and nurse your mother."

"She would not believe you, would not think you were in earnest, so would not come."

"Do you think not? Come, Miss Hall, now, seriously, there is no use in your knocking yourself up, doing the work anybody else would do just as well for a little money. Your mother is not seriously ill. I questioned that old doctor last night till he must have thought I had some designs on a legacy; and he told me there was no danger; a little nervous fever, that is all. She will get over it with attention, and nursing, and quiet."

Margaret had by this time finished the morsel of toast she had been making during the controversy, and the progress of which Mr. Iliffe, from his opposite corner, had watched with so much interest, and began to pour out the tea, preparatory to going upstairs.

"What a jolly little kitchen!" said George, taking a survey round him. "I think I shall vacate my

front room and come and live here. I always like being in the kitchen."

"Sally will soon bundle you out if you do; she occasionally gives me very strong hints to keep out of her domain."

"Ah, I had forgotten Sally."

Margaret's dainty little tray being now ready, George got off the table to hold the door open for her as she went out, and then, as there was no chance of her coming down again, and not finding the charm of the kitchen very great in her absence, he took his hat and went off to business.

Margaret subsequently heard, that in spite of her refusal, he did waylay Esther the very next day, and endeavoured to induce her to devote all her time there. Esther promised to do so if there were any necessity, but in two or three days the patient mended so far as to be able to dispense with a good deal of the attention lately bestowed on her, and Esther contented herself with getting an occasional afternoon from work, and relieving Margaret as she could then.

For this she obstinately refused all pay, and it puzzled Margaret, why she should devote so much time and attention to such comparative strangers as they were; and finding no explanation present

itself, could only attribute it to Esther's natural goodness and kindness, and grew to watch for her coming, to rely on her help and companionship as she had never done on any other woman. She admired Esther's self-reliance and self-possession, and found in her general good sense, and purity of thought and language, a strange contrast to what she had fancied a factory hand must be.

In fact Esther had tried to prepossess Miss Hall in her favour; she had a plan to carry out, a purpose to fulfil, and the readiest mode was to gain Margaret's confidence, and to show her that she was something higher in the scale than the other supposed. And Esther seldom tried to please and failed. Her quiet unobtrusive manners, her quick instinctive perception of what would hurt, and what to avoid, that seemed the most delicate courtesy in all its simplicity, and gave her a charm of which she was certainly unaware, and which moved the impulsive, generous girl she was brought in contact with, to strong admiration and respect. Mrs. Hall, too, would miss her when absent, would miss the light accustomed hand,—I think some women are born nurses as others are writers or musicians, and possess a genius for it, that no amount of mere culture can give,—and the soft, yet decided step, that

left no irritating echo on the nervous ear of the patient, but trod firmly, yet gently; and as she became able to sit up, she would wonder why Esther could not always be there, she wanted her, she missed her.

When the time came for the invalid to need nourishment, and to long for delicacies, I suppose it was on Mr. Iliffe's account that those wonderful baskets of game, and fruit, and jellies, came up from Yates's. Margaret stood aghast when they arrived day after day; then she took Mr. Iliffe to task and forestalled the chance of his sending more, by telling him she would not take them in, and indeed putting on certain dignified airs of independence, that she could assume on occasions, and which George thought became her wonderfully well, and made him smile in spite of the tender emotions that agitated him at such times.

But if she chose to be thankless and independent and rude, he was not much better in replying to her indignant charge. If she brought bitters, he did not attempt to match them with sweets. He told her when he offered *her* anything, she was quite at liberty to take it or refuse, but he never did, and if she were not more civil, he never should; but these little matters were no business of hers,

they came for her mother, not for her ; and he would not take rudeness by deputy ; if Mrs. Hall wanted to insult him, she must do it first hand, he would not take it through anybody. And first hand he knew he should never get it, and only received thanks instead, when at last he was allowed to go and see the widow sitting up for the first time, and take with him the little basket of choice fruit he had carried himself from town, and which brought a faint flush of pleasure to her pale cheek, as he laid them on her table.

Margaret did not like George ; at least her feeling towards him was of so careless a nature, that a little honest dislike would almost have been preferable ; but, turning to look at him as he stood, so tall and strong in his manhood, at the pale widow's chair, she could not help thinking how good and true he was, how kind and generous to them ; and she spoke to him just then about some trivial matter indeed, but with a voice so unconsciously softened in tone, that made George look up with a sudden thrill of hope and surprise, and expectation. Was she changing to him ? Could she ever change ? He turned from the light, and played with some trifles on the chimney-piece : ah, George, don't try for her, men have

followed women so through life, have alternated between hope and fear, have seen them full of faults, and yet have loved on slavishly, till they have seen men far less worthy take the prize they yearn for, with an easy indifference as though it were their right. Surely it is fate.

But George would not be warned ; at any rate he said, "Let me take my place, and stand in for the prize. I may not get it, it is not likely I shall, but then I have so accustomed myself to consider a blank as my portion, as a matter of course, that when it does fall to me, the disappointment can't be very great."

So he lingered in the presence he loved so well, listened to the voice with whose every intonation he was familiar, and sometimes would think on reviewing the past day, that she had been more kind, more cheerful, that she was forgetting old griefs and old ties. Ah, George, dreams all, poor little fancies, bringing but scant pleasures with them ; but leaving wide gaps when they faded away, so that he was surprised at their bulk, and the spaces they had filled, while they were yet with him, and had been given house and home, as things not quite vain, not quite delusive.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUND OUT.

MR. GRIMMITT lived in a small house up a court, near the mill. A mean house, and a mean situation, but Mr. Grummitt was not a proud man. He lived in a court, because it was cheaper than a house in a row, for much the same reason that he would have lived without eating, if it had been possible. He begrudged all the world the food they ate, the clothes they wore, the beds they slept on, he begrudged himself those comforts, and probably would have managed to exist on much less than he did, but that he feared his neighbours. Coward as he was, he trembled if a ragged urchin called him "miser" as he passed; nay, he once on being so hooted by a little vagabond in the gutter, turned back and threw the lad a halfpenny, to give him the lie.

Yet who could point at Grummitt and say, "Thou art wholly mean, wholly selfish, totally bad?" A

married sister on becoming homeless and destitute, found his home ready to receive her, and they had since lived together, working and pinching, quarrelling and haggling, but good friends nevertheless. Sometimes he may have abused and beaten her, but she never told it; he may have threatened to turn her out upon the world, and bring home a wife, but she did not believe it; she worked for him, and defended his character manfully among such of the neighbours, who, not holding such a good opinion of him, ventured to express their dislike; and she joined in his spirit of economy so entirely, as to add a few pence by washing to his earnings, and saved him many a pound besides.

On this particular morning, Mr. Grimmitt was late out of bed, having been to a house-warming the night before, and partaken, as he always did when he had a chance at somebody else's cost, very freely of strong waters, had overslept himself, and it wanted only nine minutes to the first bell when he sat down to his breakfast.

To make up for lost time, he rated his sister in his usual elegant and affectionate style, bade her to get out of the house before he came back to dinner, “or he'd kick her out,” and never let him see her face again. All of which fraternal advice she accepted

with the most perfect indifference, and told him at the end, she wondered he talked so much, as he lost a mouthful for every sentence ; an argument which, as he was certainly by no means obtuse on the subject in his own interest, struck him at once as being good, and effected the desired result. But it was a bad beginning, and put him out for the rest of the morning, causing him to see so much need of correction in the "hands," that the loss of his strap was a serious one ; he would have had so many chances of using it, he thought, with a regret quite pathetic.

His discomfort had by no means decreased, when about twelve o'clock he was summoned to Mr. Miles's private room. On his way there, in passing through the long room, he noticed a woman standing idle by one of the windows, and talking to the spinners near. Thinking she was one of the regular work-women, he went up and took her roughly by the shoulder.

"Why the devil arn't you——"

The woman turned to him, and he shrank back. It was Martha Tay. She smiled, and a titter ran through the spinners at his discomfiture.

"What brings you here ?" he asked hoarsely, and under his breath.

"Mr. Francis sent for me."

Grimmitt might have read the approach of his downfall in the woman's careless, disrespectful way of speaking: he would have felt he was no longer master.

"I want to speak to you a moment," he said, not feeling all this certainly, but having a pretty sure foreboding that it was not all right.

"Grimmitt!" shouted the master.

"I must go," he went on hurriedly; "the master is calling me; but don't you wait here, go home, I'll come to you directly; I've something to tell you: my dear, it was all a mistake: I know you'll be glad to hear what I've got to tell you——"

The woman only laughed.

"I'm none for goin'," she answered.

"Grimmitt!" repeated the master, from his room.

"Coming, sir, coming. Now there's a dear woman, do go when I ask you, you'll be sorry you stayed, when I tell you all about it. Do go, here's a shilling to get something to drink while you're waiting for me; come now, go at once, be off."

"I wanted bread last week, an' thee wouldn't gi' me a crust," the woman said bitterly; "na, I'll stay, I'm none goin' for thee."

"No, no, I didn't mean it, and I'll see what can

be done," repeated Grimmitt; "there's the master again, I must go, whether or not," and he ran down the long room, as the master repeated his call.

In the private room he found not only the master, but Mr. Francis as well.

"Come in, Grimmitt," said Mr. Candy Miles, "and shut the door."

Frank was standing at the fireplace, and his father at the table; there was something ominous in the way they both fixed their eyes upon the overlooker's face as he came in. Such a suspicion must have crossed Grimmitt's mind, already disturbed and ill at ease, for he stopped short and hesitated.

"You may as well do as my father wishes, Mr. Grimmitt, unless you wish all the factory to hear what he has to say to you," said Frank, quietly and cruelly sarcastic.

"I don't know that your father could say anything to me I should mind everybody hearing," said Grimmitt going back to shut the door.

The minute it took him to do so (it was a proverbially unwieldy lock) must have been a painful one, for when he turned round again, the expression of his face had changed not merely in colour, but the jaw seemed to have fallen, the whole face seemed depressed and sunk. It startled Frank to see the change.

"Within the last six months, Mr. Grummitt," began the master, impressively enough to make Grummitt feel he was making his charge, "there have occurred two accidents in my mill, in the hands that work under you. Do you remember the cases I speak of?"

Grummitt hesitated.

"If your memory is defective, I think I can assist it by names and dates," said Mr. Francis, with malicious civility.

Grummitt turned upon him.

"Thank you, sir," he said feebly, "I remember now."

"Do you remember," resumed the master, watching him with his keen eyes, "that I said each hand that was injured should have a regular payment, and that for these two I myself fixed the sums, and told you to draw it for them?"

Oh, it was cruel to have these questions poured out upon him without preparation or notice, and with that lad watching him to gloat over his discomfiture, to exult in his degradation. Grummitt's head bowed lower, he writhed, he hesitated, and muttered inaudibly.

"Speak out!" cried the master, stamping his foot; "or I'll save you the trouble; you did remember it, because you *drew the money!*"

Grimmitt started, and faced his accuser like an animal at bay; he flung aside the stupor that had been upon him, when he first heard the charge, he was a man again. That was known, was it! Well, there was one course yet left to him, to brave it out with lies, and on this ground he took his stand with dogged determination.

"I did receive the money," he said firmly; "and I paid it."

"You are telling me a lie," said the master.

"I am not."

"I will fetch the woman in, father," interrupted Frank eagerly, "to disprove what he asserts."

Grimmitt compressed his lips at perceiving the regular train that had been laid for him; that woman was in it, after all. The master's eyes were on him, those keen, steadfast, searching eyes, of whose power their owner was so well aware. Mr. Candy Miles never stared when he looked at you with a purpose; he saw deep, deep down; there was no knowing into which of your secrets he was diving. They were very bright and keen and searching now,—they were doing their work,—they were telling.

"Go on, Frank," said the master, without moving an inch; "tell us what the woman can prove."

"She can prove that the money was never received,

—she can prove that she was left to starve under the impression we would allow her nothing,—she can prove that one pound was all she ever received, and that she was promised another when she should leave the town, she can prove——”

“ Ha !” cried the master, catching a change in the face subjected to his rigorous test ; “ ha, it *was* a lie.”

“ No, no,” faltered Grimmitt

“ I tell you it *was* a lie.”

“ Leave me a moment to think, you madden me, I condemn myself without knowing——”

“ It *was* a lie !”

“ Listen to me, let me explain : that woman was bribed to swear against me, it is all got up against me ; it is all false, if you will only hear me——”

“ It *was* a lie !”

The eyes never moved, they watched the victim writhe, and turn, and contort his face, but they knew no pity, no remorse, they were driving out the acknowledgment of the lie—it should come out.

“ Mr. Miles, I have served you long and faithfully, I brought upon myself the dislike and hatred of all the mill because I have served your interests instead of considering how I should get popularity ; this charge has been made up by them to turn me out, to ruin your trust in me, to——”

“ *It was a lie !* ”

“ I have known very well that ever since your son came into the mill, he has set his mind on getting me out. Through him the hands have neglected their work and not cared for my authority ; he has undermined me wherever he could ; he has insulted me before the hands, and now he trumps this story, and brings the testimony of a disreputable woman to carry him out and prove it true——”

“ *It was a lie !* ”

“ It is now six years, Mr. Candy Miles, since I first came. Look back at those years and see when I have dishonoured my trust, see whether this charge would stand before proofs of six years of undoubted honesty, see if—if—”

“ *It was a lie !* ”

The master pressed on,—it was telling, telling fast, human bravado couldn’t withstand it, he was breaking, breaking fast, one more charge and then,—

“ Mr. Miles, can’t you forgive this one fault ? Can’t you overlook it ? I was so poor, I have to keep my sister, I have had losses, the temptation was so great——”

“ *It was a lie !* ”

“ If I own it—if I acknowledge my fault—it is only a small one; for God’s sake have mercy on me ;

if I say yes, you will not prosecute me, I am so poor ? If you ruin my character all hope of future work is gone ; I shall be a beggar ; my sister must go to the workhouse——”

“ It was a lie ! ”

“ It—WAS ! ”

The master was satisfied, the eyes had done their work, and he turned aside as though the case had lost its interest for him after that point was gained.

Both Frank and Mr. Grimmitt looked at him to see what he intended to do, and the latter took advantage of the silence to plead his cause, to renew his supplications for mercy, to bring to mind his six years' honesty and service.

Frank did not attempt to interrupt him, and he pleaded long and earnestly ; the master, half turned aside, seemed scarcely to hear him. At last he turned upon him, quick, irritable, impatient.

“ Go out of the place, go out of the mill, never let me see your face again. Go.”

“ You will not prosecute me, you will not——”

“ Go ! ”

“ You will not allow any proceedings——”

“ Go ! ” thundered the master, and Grimmitt went.

“ My dear father,” expostulated Frank, “ you will not allow the scoundrel to escape. I have evidence

and witnesses against him sufficient to prove any case."

"Tush, lad, I'm not going to law."

"Six months would do him good in gaol," Frank said, doubtfully.

The master looked up with a smile on his face.

"You left the woman in the mill, didn't you, my lad?"

"Yes."

"Of course she'll talk, women always do; what she says will go round the mill——"

"Well, father?"

"Don't you see the result? To-day's Saturday; if Grimmel sees to-morrow's daylight, he'll be a cleverer man than I take him to be."

"You think the hands will——"

"Hush! not a word, wait and see: I know more of factory life than you do, Frank, and there are some desperate fellows in our place."

The master took up his paper, as though declining further conversation, and Mr. Francis returned to his own room.

CHAPTER XIV.

PREPARATION FOR FLIGHT.

RELEASED from his harassing examination, Grimmitt came out of the master's room hanging his head like a whipt dog ; he avoided going through the mill, and reaching the nearest door he slunk out into the street.

He knew his only resource was instantaneous flight, the master would not prosecute him, but the "hands!" What would protect him from their violence, if they learnt his crime ? Whereas after all if he escaped them, and got away safe with his little capital, it did not much matter ; the loss of character was no very great loss to him, Grimmitt thought.

He startled his sister by coming upon her suddenly as she stood in the court, washing.

"Lord, Grimmitt ! what brings you here ?"

He bade her be quiet, and beckoned her into the house.

"Now, then, let's have no bother. I'm going

away. You must follow with the things. If you stay longer than to-night I wouldn't give a whistle for your life. Maybe there'll be a rise to-night among the hands, and if they catch either of us, they'll murder us. I go first, you come after; what things you can't bring, leave behind you."

Grissel Grummitt was either a woman of great presence of mind, or she shared more fully in her brother's doings than was generally supposed, and as co-conspirator was always on the scent for danger and always on the alert, for she took the somewhat alarming proposition with the utmost coolness, and only remarked, as she wiped the soapsuds from her long bare arms,—

"Got into trouble, then?"

Grummitt nodded.

"Stop and have your dinner first: it's all ready."

"No, no. I can't. I must be off at once; give me—damnation! there's the bell!"

For as he spoke, the factory dinner bell rang, and he stood back from the open door, and shut it.

"There's one chance gone. They'd be out before I could get twelve yards. Bar the door, can't you!"

He strode to and fro with his hands clenched and his brows bent over his bright watchful eyes: he felt the stake he was playing for was a chance, perhaps of

life or death. The woman, far less moved, stood at the fireplace, gaunt and tall, with her old patched frock of a rusty dull red colour clinging to her spare figure, powerful and muscular as a man, and her light blue eyes watching her brother. She was older than he, and had been doing battle with the world ever since she came into it, and got scared and lined and hardened in the fight. Her hair was quite grey, and though still thick, was broken and irregular, and twisted in a sort of careless savage way round her head, and finished in a knot behind, like a ball of coarse grey worsted. She was not pleasant to look at, children in the street ran from her if she turned her scared crafty face towards them, and dared not even hoot her. Going to the door she secured lock and bolt, and laid a heavy bar of iron across it, doing it, however, in an easy, indifferent manner, as though she scorned the precautions she took, and would rather have dared them to come on and do their worst.

“The chest,” Grimmitt said, and they dragged a great massive chest against the door. “If any one raps just tell them out of the window I’m gone out, and taken the key with me. Now, then, give us something to eat.”

While Grissel was dishing the meat she had pre-

pared, and he was satisfied she was too much occupied to think of following him, he went upstairs. In that dark dingy little house, Grimmitt had chosen for his own sleeping room the darkest and dingiest of the three rooms it contained, perhaps thinking that the less inviting it was in appearance the less probability there was of its being intruded on in his absence. For James Grimmitt, trusting no one, was even suspicious of the gaunt friendless woman who had toiled and scraped with him. There was no knowing, he said, what she got up to when he was away, and when, three years ago, he had first taken her into his service and home, he had used to steal out from work and watch her when she least thought it. But Grissel was faithful to *him*, at least ; she would have robbed all the world without a scruple, but not him of a halfpenny ; he had offered her shelter when her husband had left her, and her own dishonesty and harsh, unconciliatory manners had shut all chance of honest employment from her : his timely aid had touched her rude nature, and through poverty, starvation, and crime, she would have clung to him, have shielded him at the expense of her own character and liberty, and for him borne punishment, disgrace, neglect.

He was not kind to her; but then he was kind

to no one: his language was brutal, and he had more than once threatened ill-usage, small as he was; but he knew she would never turn again; she loved him, in her way, and would have taken blows, as she took his hard words, in sullen silence. Associating with none of the neighbours, going through her work day after day morose and lonely, she asked no reward in kindness or money, and got none. It was a strange tie.

But he would not trust her, notwithstanding; she may have guessed at his illegal gains and hoards, but he never told her; he thought she might be in league with others—might be bribed to learn his wealth; women were so treacherous, no one could ever tell when he had got to the bottom of them; so he always affected a certain poverty towards her, bemoaned his low pay, his losses, his misfortunes, and she believing him or not as might be—always affected to do so; and received his assertions as though she did.

Making sure, then, that she was engaged below, he stole upstairs. Like many small swindlers Grimmitt fancied all large banking institutions were only robberies on a larger scale; the robbers moved in society, and had carriages, and were not often found out—that was the only difference between

him and them. He wasn't going to trust his money there, if he knew it, so he pulled out a brick in the chimney of his little room, and hid it there.

Going to it now he chuckled over his own wisdom. Year after year the hoard had been increasing, and when he should steal away that afternoon, he would go with every halfpenny about him, a rich man. Once gone clean off, let them come in as they liked, and spite their rage on the few sticks and chattels that so meagrely furnished his house—let them come. It was something gleeful to think of their mad disappointment. Ha, ha ! James Grimmitt had been too sharp for them after all !

He took out the money, and counted it over with the keen relish of a miser. It was all in coin,—no bank-notes for him. He almost fancied that to cheat him out of his few earnings, the Government itself might take a fancy to disown its own paper. At any rate, it was as well to be safe, and gold was always good ; so he hoarded that. His next difficulty was where to stow it about his person ; and while he was yet pondering, with all his coin spread out on the bed before him, a glittering tempting heap, a slight noise behind him attracted his attention, and turning sharply with a sudden spasm of fear, he saw his sister standing there, coolly looking

at the wealth displayed before her. He started up from the edge of the bed with a curse.

“ You devil ! what brings you here ? ”

“ Dinner’s ready,” the woman said, quite complacently, and without removing her attention from the money.

He was jealous that she should look at it, as though its very value decreased with her knowledge of the possession, and he threw a blanket over it.

“ You dogged me up, damn you ! Why couldn’t you call if you wanted me. Besides,” he added, waxing cautious, as though she possessed a real power over him now, and it was necessary to keep well with her, “ it isn’t all mine, you know ; I only keep it because—— ”

“ James, you are a fool,” said Mistress Grissel, very contemptuously, and laying her hand on her brother’s shoulder, as he took up his place again on the bed beside his dear treasure. “ It’s now more than three years since I first came here. I’ve served you faithful, as no servant would have served you ; scraped and worked, and almost starved to save for you.”

“ Yes, yes, you’ve been very good—very good, Grissel ; but I’ve kept you, you know, my dear ;—I’ve kept you in board and lodging.”

"I've worked like a slave, and I've been fed like a slave, and treated like a slave, and haven't asked for a halfpenny in pay," the woman went on.

"Eh, my dear, it isn't all mine," broke in Grimmitt, following what he fancied must be her train of thought after seeing the money; "it's a good deal, though it looks more than it really is, lying there; but it isn't half—not half mine."

"But for all this," Grissel went on, without heeding him, "for all this you've never trusted me: you've told lies to me, and hidden from me, as though I were a stranger, and yet I might have gone off with all that, when you were away, and you should never have found me."

"Eh! what!" screamed Grimmitt.

"Do you think I've never seen it before? Do you think I didn't know where it was?" And she laughed her hard, dry, mocking laugh.

"And you took some! I know you took some!" cried Grimmitt; not that he had ever missed any, but because he did not think human nature capable of such self-restraint, as to see money and not take it.

"No, I never did; and you know that. I never took a farthing. But if you'd trusted me—if you'd told me what you were about—you'd never have

got into this scrape; I'd have managed better for you."

"Well, well, I daresay you are very clever, and know better than I do; a woman's a good match for the devil any day. But if you'll help me, and I get safe off, why you shall be treated better, Grissel; and perhaps we'll share a bit more when we meet again," Grimmitt said coaxingly. "Just help me to stow this away, will you; I must get off soon you know, before dusk."

Perhaps Grissel may not have placed much confidence in the prospect held out to her of fairer dealings, and more liberal treatment; but she made no comment, helped him to conceal his money, making impromptu pockets all about him with needle and packthread, and sewing them up strongly when filled, and indeed exhibiting an aptitude for concealment and dodging, that drew forth expressions of admiration from her brother, more expressive than elegant.

This done, they went down to dinner. In the court all seemed going on as usual; there were no knots of people to whisper together, and conspire ominously; the men living in the houses round, had come home to dinner as usual, and there was nothing stirring about, calculated to give alarm

to the most anxious watcher. After all it was likely his fear was premature; they might have no ill-will against him, they might not even have learnt his crime.

But this comfortable supposition did not last him long. Before he had half got through his dinner, he grew restless and afraid.

"I must be off, Grissel, I must be off," he said, coming from the table to the window, and then back again. If he stayed at the table more than three minutes, he was convinced there was a crowd gathering in the court; he knew there was. He pushed his plate from before him; he could not eat. Why was it not time to be off? It was worse watching and waiting.

"There's the bell," Grissel said, at last, as the factory bell rang for the hands to return to the mill.

He was free; now, the streets would be cleared for a few hours, at any rate, now was the time to be off. Grissel brought his hat and cloak. Why did not he put them on, and be off? Why did he linger?

But fear, intense dread and terror, had seized him, with the cruel grasp they have always in waiting for the cowardly and faint of heart. Crouching on a low seat by the fire, he put his hands

before his face, and shivered fearfully, when she urged upon him that the time was come for action. No, no, he would not go ; he knew they were waiting for him : they would murder him, he must have the police down ; they would burn him out if he did not come and be butchered of his own free will. No, no, he must wait till night ; they would not see him then, and he could steal out in the dark. Hark ! was not that some one at the door ? He knew they had not gone to work, he knew they were waiting for him ; he knew——

“ Hush ! ” said Grissel, sternly, as the blows or kicks were repeated at the door, “ there is some one ; a neighbour, I dare say. Be still while I open the door.”

“ No ! don’t touch the door ! Keep back. I’ll brain you with the poker if you touch that chest ! Go up to the window, and answer them that way ; and you can look about you at the same time.”

Grissel went up, and Grimmitt skipt up nimbly after her. Opening the window, she found it was only a small boy, whose infantile kicks at the door, terror had magnified into the preparatory blows of determined assassins.

“ What do you want, my boy ? ” asked Grissel, of

the civil tongue ; “Grimmitt’s out and took the key with him.”

“Please, master sent me t’ ask if you’d want th’ paper next week, as usual,” sang out the boy looking up at her.

Faithful to her spirit of economy, Grissel would have said no, but Grimmitt, whose wits were considerably quickened by apprehension, saw, or thought he saw, a double meaning in the lad’s errand, and tugging at his sister’s arm violently, he said in a hoarse whisper,—

“Yes, yes, we shall want it for a good many weeks more; tell him to be sure and bring it.” Grissel repeated the message to the lad, who received it with a whistle. Grimmitt thought the whistle implied incredulity. “Here, here, don’t let him go; tell him he’s a good boy, and give him twopence, and ask—ask if his master would like the paper paid for in advance this week—make haste.”

Although greatly shocked at this prospect of lavish expenditure, for which they were to get no return, Grissel repeated the message word for word.

The lad refused the twopence ! Grimmitt’s heart sank within him; his entire experience of lads, naturally a large one, told him that it was not

natural for a boy to refuse twopence; there was evidently more in it than appeared. Grissel repeated the offer of ready payment, the boy said he would ask his master, and backed away from the door, and Grissel, turning from the window, did not think it necessary to watch his further movements; but as Grimmitt a second or two after, thinking the coast was clear, ventured to rise from the stooping posture he had occupied behind his sister, the same childish voice cried out exultingly,—

“Grimmitt’s out, is he? and got the key! Oh, my eye, what a crammer!”

The young vagabond having probably heard the whispering up above, had climbed the pump in the middle of the court, and being able from that elevated position to look into the room through the still open window, had seen Grimmitt as he rose.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEMESIS.

THE court in which Grummitt's house was one, opened into a long, narrow, dark street lined with small houses on either side, and occupied almost without an exception by factory hands. Being Saturday afternoon, and pay-day, the mills closed sooner than on other days, and it was still light when the hands came trooping down in groups of five or six, and instead of going to their homes clustered together in this particular street, and were apparently all earnestly busied with one object, and one purpose.

Men dark, strong, and begrimed, with savage revenge expressed on their faces, stood and consulted together, gesticulating violently at times, and at others dropping their voices to a hoarse whisper, and stripping their powerful arms to the elbow, with a low, ominous laugh. Women, collected in large groups, carried on their intercourse with one

another in loud, high-pitched voices, and with shrill, gleeful mirth, more expressive than musical; women young and old; women shrivelled, and bent, and smoke-dried could still clench their skinny, almost fleshless, trembling hands to avenge injury; and women young, and full of warm eager life, tossed their arms aloft, and indulged in imaginary assaults; while children at their feet gathered stones and balls of mud in their ragged frocks, and received loud and boisterous commendations for their thoughtfulness. They were getting ammunition for the coming fray.

The only drawback was that there were so many avengers, and so little to wreak the vengeance of that vast united mass upon. Why the life would be beaten out of that poor feeble little body, before a fifth of them had had the luxury of a blow. They wanted a Goliah or a Samson, or a dozen Grimmers rolled into one, not the miserable fragment of humanity offered here for their delectation; something to oppose, something to gloat over, to dwell on, to conquer. Were they ever so tender with *him*, his life would be half out of him with terror before a blow was struck. Besides, they had no intention of killing Mr. Grimmel,—they would maul him, deform him, half crush him, but no murder. There seemed to be an universal shrink-

ing from that ; after they had done, there must be no dead body to dispose of, or to stand up against them ; and strangely enough, those dark, scowling men were enforcing tenderness of handling upon each other ; whoever got the first chance must use it mercifully ; no stunning first blow, let every one have a chance. Fair dealing must be the order of the day.

Yet it never seemed to occur to them that they were doing a cowardly thing in attacking one feeble, defenceless man in such a body. Their narrow notions of right and wrong afforded no such views ; they had been wronged, two of them had been trifled with and defrauded, one of them had died through it ; it was a gap made in the system of trust between master and man, and the whole body felt it was a thing to be avenged, to make a mark of ; a thing never to be forgotten. Not only Candy Miles's mill hands were there, reinforcements from other factories swelled the tide ; it was a common wrong, so they crowded on, and ere the daylight faded a moving mass of heads occupied all the space.

No one entered the court ; no one should give him the alarm : he should not know it till he was amongst them : he should come out of his own accord and will into the very midst, and then—

Ah, Grimmit! could every single coin about thee be transformed each into a man, and the whole form thy body guard, it would still be a hard fight in the struggle to come; but alone! with no chance of help from police or law—for the body was by far too formidable to be put down in the usual way, and the offenders too many and in themselves too powerful not to make the threat of punishment futile—heaven help thee!

He was at that time crouching over the fire, conjecturing, wondering, fearing. Utterly unconscious of what was preparing for him, he was still very nervous and anxious; he wanted to be off; he wanted to assure himself there was no danger, no reason for fear—but he could not. He could not summon courage to start. He listened with acute anxiety for sounds outside; sounds that he might define into some meaning, and might gather from them how the case really stood. But it was all quiet, and Grissel tried to urge him on; there was no fear, he created terrors himself, and frightened himself with his own fancy; why was he so cowardly? She didn't fear; she would go herself, and see that it was all clear.

“No, no, dear Grissel, don't go; don't leave me,” he cried, and clutched her gown.

"What nonsense!" she said, impatiently. "If you've made up your mind to stay the night, all well and good, and I'll say no more."

"No, no, I must be off to-night; I can't stop, I must go now at once."

"Why don't you, then? You'll stop there all night. Shall I walk to the station with you?"

"No; they know you so well; they'd know us together directly; and if I go by myself I can creep under the shadow of the houses, and never be noticed."

"Creep in the shadow!" cried the woman with great scorn. "Go down boldly in the middle of the street, and look every man you meet flatly in the face; show them you're not afraid! That's what I'd do," and indeed she most likely would.

Grimmitt shook his head; it was evident his notions and hers did not at all agree on that subject. "Show them he wasn't afraid!" why, he trembled in every limb at the thought of them, and, as to meeting them boldly, he felt he should take to his heels if he saw a "hand" at the other end of the street; unless, indeed, he was a cripple, and then the noble blood in Mr. Grimmel's veins would probably have reached boiling point, and he would have gone up and struck him!

But as it grew later, Mr. Grimmitt lent his ear to the proposition he had previously rejected, and thought Grissel had better, if she wouldn't mind, just run to the bottom of the court and see that it was all clear; it would not take her a minute. He put the question timidly, and graced it with more endearing terms than he was wont to use, for he thought she might very reasonably refuse; but Grissel had no such apprehension, and threw a shawl over her head preparatory to going, with the utmost readiness.

"And you won't mind the door being locked behind you," Mr. Grimmitt suggested, as he helped to move aside the heavy chest, lying across the door.

"Well, you might as well leave it open, I think, as I'm on your errand."

"Very well."

He let her out, shut the door behind her without so much as throwing a glance outside, and then after a moment's consideration, he drew forward bar and bolt, and made all secure again. "She don't care," he said; for even he felt the act a little treacherous. And then, somehow, rendered more courageous and light-hearted, and feeling more secure than he had done all the previous afternoon, he sat on the corner of the chest, slapping his sides

where the money was, swinging his little legs with well assumed nonchalance, and certainly looking in the dim firelight very much like a little twisted fiend, meditating something more than usually demoniacal.

But suddenly there rose a great shout, a shout swelled and repeated by many human voices ; a shout that was at first some distance off, but which came nearer every second, and was louder—louder. Grimmitt started up, and shrieked himself when he heard it. Good God ! it was all as he feared, then ; they were there ; they had been waiting—they were coming now—what should he do ? They would kill him.

The shouts were nearer now, he could hear the court filling with people ; feet after feet were pouring in ; they were at his step ! As the first heavy stroke fell on the door, he thought the first hand was laid on his shoulder ; they had him now ; there was no help—O God !

He piled chairs, table and stools against the door. They were calling him to come out ; and then there was a lull of the noise. A moment left for thought, perhaps for escape ! There was no back entrance to the house ; it was built back to another one ; on either side were houses still ; there was no skylight,

not even a faulty place in the roof; the only windows looked out upon the court, and that was filled with raging men thirsting for his blood. No, there was no escape, no help. He sank down on his knees stunned, hopeless, despairing, and clasped his hands before his face. He thought he would almost say a prayer; if there was another world (which he wasn't at all sure of), it might secure him a little interest there; but a holy word had not passed his lips since he was a little child, and he had forgotten it all now!

Outside, the court was filled; not half those that were collected could squeeze into it: the neighbouring houses were filled. Just before Grimmitt's door, surrounded by the most powerful leaders of the movement was Grissel, bleeding from a cut she had got across the cheek, and with her wild grey hair all torn and lying tangled over her face and shoulders; a strange gaunt fearful figure, but firm and resolute still.

They had dragged her there by main force, and now bade her tell her brother to open the door.

"If he don't," one of them added, brandishing a cleaver, "I'll brain thee wi' this."

"Grimmitt, my lad," sang out Grissel, "keep up lock and bolt, for all they say."

"Strike her down," cried voices from behind; but those near hesitated. They wanted Grummitt, not her, and she had got pretty well of knocking about already; besides they could get him without her help, so they thrust her aside, and dealt their blows on the door; if he would not come to them they would go to him. Hurra! the door was beginning to yield already; it was but a poor thing. But before it yielded, some of the tallest had mounted upon each others' shoulders, and were battering in the crazy casement, and all the while the crowd behind who could not assist, kept up the excitement with wild shouts, and flung small missiles indiscriminately, that rebounded and fell among the besiegers and increased the confusion. Smash went the window frame; in bounded a tall athlete youth, eager for the honour of a first encounter. It was Grummitt's own bedroom into which he had gained admittance, and grasping his club he stumbled down the narrow dark stairs into the kitchen, expectant of a sly blow at every turn, from out the darkness. The kitchen was all smoke; besides being already dusk, a thick white steam filled the space and prevented him seeing across it. He dashed forward; the place seemed afire; he shouted out, half bewildered, and his friends

answered him from outside; directly upon that, the top portion of the door, where it was not supported by the chest, gave way, and a host of them leapt over into the kitchen.

The steam evaporated, and was found to have proceeded from the fire, over which a considerable quantity of water had been thrown, and which was now trickling through the grate upon the floor. But where was the man we left but a few seconds back, on his knees on the hearthstone?

They said he must be hiding, and searched each crevice and corner, bringing flaring lights to bear upon the subject; they crowded upstairs; they broke the furniture; they sounded the walls; they shouted out dreadful threats of what they would do, if he did not come forth; but they could not find him. They fell upon Grissel, and tried to exact the secret of his hiding-place from her; but she knew as little as they, and was as much astonished at his disappearance. Suddenly an idea struck three or four lads gathered round the kitchen fireplace, and acting upon it, they caught up some straw that had been torn from Grissel's bed in the search, and crammed it in the still dripping firegrate. The men swore at them for getting larking then, but the lads went on, and having filled the grate, seized a light and ignited

the straw. It burnt up briskly, and as the first flames ascended the chimney, an unmistakeable groan was heard. It stilled that noisy assembly like magic; they saw the trick now: Grimmitt was up the chimney!

A great shout was raised, and was echoed and repeated by those outside, as the discovery went from lip to lip. Hurra! they had earthed the fox at last. Grissel sprang forward, pushed aside those immediately clustered round the fireplace, and thrusting her hands into the grate, dragged out the burning straw, and threw it on the hearth.

“Grimmitt! Grimmitt!” she called, thrusting herself over the grate, and looking up the chimney.

There was no answer, and the groans had ceased; but she thrust her long arms up, and there came tumbling down upon her a blackened, lifeless mass. She scarcely thought it was he at first; the body fell coiled in a ball, and quite black with soot, and lay motionless and heavy as it had fallen.

Grissel’s lips and face turned ghastly white, and a thrill of horror ran through all there. They thought he was dead, and as she moved towards the door, bearing him in her arms, they made way for her, and laid him on the chest. He had lost

all sense : the fire had burnt away bits of his trousers and slightly scorched his legs ; but the smoke ascending from the straw laid in the wet grate, had most probably rendered him almost insensible to the pain before the flames burnt upwards.

They threw water in his face, and it fell from him in black streams, leaving the whitened, pinched face lying upwards and motionless ; the glaring light of the torches falling on it and making it look more ghastly. They gathered round, awed and silenced by their own work, and tried to chafe back life into the black, heavy hands ; but their efforts were vain, and Grissel, bending over him with her hand upon his heart, thought the beating had stopped. She looked up at the men standing near.

“ I must have a doctor ; we can do nothing,” she said. “ He is dead ; you can have no more revenge on him. Go, and leave me in peace.”

They shook their heads.

“ What would you have ? ” she cried. “ Do you want to drag him limb from limb ? Isn’t it enough that you have killed him ? ”

“ There be som’ert else we want, missus,” one of them said.

“ Is it me ? I’ll come to-morrow, and you shall kill me by inches, if you will. I’ll not go away—

don't fear that; but go now, leave him to me; give me a chance to bring him back."

They looked down upon him as he lay, and the spokesman, laying his hand on the motionless breast, said,—

"He robbed 'em, an' let 'im starve. Why sho' we ha' mercy o' he?"

"Mercy! and you have killed him!"

"Na, we've na killed him: but there be money here, an' here, an' here," and he passed his hand over the clothes, and felt the money that was sown there.

"He worked for it honestly among you," asserted Grissel, true even yet to her notions of saving; "if you take it, you'll leave him a beggar."

Those round laughed, and a dozen hands began rifling the body. The money, being in coin, was soon found, and when it had been all taken—when Grissel had watched each hiding place, so skilfully made, yet now so easily found when no resistance could be made, pilfered of the hard earnings, and scrapings, and thievings of years—when no more could be found, and she herself, with a regret that was too genuine to be suspected, owned they had got it all, and if her brother did recover it would be to beggary—they seemed undetermined how next

to proceed. At length, after a consultation among themselves, they slowly one and all left the house, and permitted Grissel to get what aid she could towards restoring her brother, if, indeed, restoration were possible.

But it was more than an hour before the assembly outside dispersed ; the money taken from Grimmitt had been dispensed among them, and they still kept up a continual shouting, as though but half satisfied with the arrangement that had been made by their leaders, and had half a mind to fall on the unhappy household once more. Poor Grissel blockaded up her broken door and window as she best could, re-lit the fire, and made a bed for Grimmitt beside it. It was very desolate ; all the furniture lay smashed and scattered about ; the straw torn from the beds, and the scant coverings lying wet and dirtied as they had been trodden under foot. The cold night air came in through the apertures ; and there lay the motionless, ghastly figure on the bed, with the faint firelight playing on the face ; and outside the shouts still rang.—Let us close the scene.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNFORESEEN.

THE crisis of Mrs. Hall's illness past, and that lady on a fair way to recovery, Margaret resumed her neglected music lessons. One evening, before she had returned home, and while Mr. George Iliffe sat at his fireside listening for that return—for though, now that Mrs. Hall was upstairs, he could no longer take up his position in the family sitting-room, yet he was easier in his mind when he knew Margaret was in the house, and was pleased at times to catch her footstep and voice—while, I say, he sat listening, he heard the servant talking at the front door, and explaining “Miss Hall was out,” to a gentleman inquiring for her.

“What is it?” George said, coming out of his room, though it was certainly no business of his.

“A message, sir,” the servant said, “from Mr. Miles.”

“If you will step in, I will deliver the message

when Miss Hall returns," George said, and Mr. Fairly, clerk at the Mill, followed him into his room.

"The message, sir, is from Mr. Miles," began the clerk, a little nervously, "and was to be delivered to Miss Hall in person."

"You will prefer waiting till Miss Hall returns?"

"No. I do not think it necessary; at least I——— that is, Mr. Miles wished me to call and inquire after Mrs. Hall's health. How is the lady?"

"Better, but still ailing," George said stiffly, not much liking advances made from that quarter.

"Ah, indeed! And change of air, sir,—just at the season, too,—the summer season, close upon us—so bad in town, so beautiful elsewhere. You think a little change of air would prove beneficial?"

"I do not think Mrs. Hall could be safely moved at present."

"Ah, dear me, a great pity—such a break down: but a nice gentle climate, sea air—recommended by the highest physicians. Mr. F——— Mr. Miles, that is, thought a month or two at Brighton might invigorate the system and restore the nerves——"

"Is this your message, sir?"

"Yes: the ladies have a house down there they frequent in the season, and if Mrs. Hall were so

inclined, Mr. Miles begged me to say it was quite at her disposal as long as she might like."

"And Mr. Candy Miles sent this—this offer?"

"Yes," said the clerk; but meeting Mr. Iliffe's savage looks he turned away confused, and George smiled at the poor little lie laid so bare to him.

"Mr. Candy Miles must have returned suddenly. Our house wrote up to London to him this morning on business," he said. "But whoever may have sent this kind offer, oblige me by telling him that Mrs. Hall has plenty of friends who will procure every remedy that may be suggested, and that all further offers of help can be well dispensed with."

"You refuse it then, sir?"

"Yes," said George, angrily, "and wonder it should have been offered."

"But—but Miss Hall may think differently," suggested the clerk.

"If she should, her wishes shall be forwarded to you," George said, and bowed Mr. Fairly out of the room.

"So he is after her again, is he, the damned scoundrel! He thinks she may be slighted and thrown aside, and picked up at will." And George walked up and down his room in a fury of indignation. Ah, if *he* might be Margaret's champion—

might insure her from the insult of further offers like this !

Margaret coming home soon after, and learning from the girl that some one had been to see her, she went into Mr. Iliffe's room to learn the result of the interview.

George delivered the message, watching her meanwhile as she stood at the table, and grinding his teeth to see how her face flushed. Perhaps she knew as well as he did that the message had not come from Mr. Candy Miles, but she said quite innocently,—

“ It was kind of Mr. Candy Miles to think of us.”

“ Very kind ! ” laughed George.

She looked up at him quickly.

“ You saw him—Mr. Fairly—what answer did you send back ? ”

“ I told him I considered the offer an insult, and that your mother had plenty of other friends to attend to her comforts,” Mr. Iliffe said.

Margaret's brows contracted.

“ And you sent back that message in my name ? ”

“ Yes.”

Margaret did not speak, but George felt she was by no means pleased ; the fingers playing on the table

unconsciously revealed the irritation she would not express in words.

" You think I have done wrong," George said, sadly ; " you think that I have exceeded my authority, Margaret. It does not matter, if you think differently on this subject from me, from what I thought you would, there is an opening left, and you can accept the offer."

" I do not wish to accept it," Margaret said, with some hesitation ; " but I think a civil reply should have been returned."

" Shall I write an apology to Mr. Fairly ? "

Perhaps Margaret was not thinking of Mr. Fairly as the person to whom the apology might be due, but she did not acquaint George with her opinion on the subject, and turned to go.

" I suppose I am in fault as usual, Miss Hall ? " asked George, bitterly.

" I do not think it was right to give so poor a return for a proffered kindness——"

" Margaret, think how it was meant!" broke out George ; " think of the meaning that this poor excuse scarcely suffices to cover, and for God's sake don't be so blind to what is due to your own dignity."

" What do you mean ? " Margaret said.

" I think you must know already, Margaret.

You know, as well as I do, that this offer—this miserable; mean, wretched offer—no more comes from Candy Miles than it does from me.”

“ I do not see why not, there is no one else.”

“ Is there not? May it not come from Frank Miles? It does come from him, I know.”

“ And—and what if it should ?”

“ What if it should ! Good heaven, Margaret ! have more respect for yourself, don’t let him fancy you will return——” George stopped; there was a deep burning blush on the face before him, and the dark eyes were looking at him angrily, defiantly. Those few unlucky words had wiped from poor George’s account all the credit owing for his past kindness; Margaret thought he took out his payment in dictating to her. She did not understand George, perhaps she could not appreciate him, or she had never tried to do, and was always doing him some injustice.

“ He wants to see you again,” George added, more quietly; “ this offer is but a pretext, the true intention glares very plainly through it, I think; and if this be accepted, he will see you next.”

Margaret looked at him very steadily.

“ I have seen him already,” she said.

“ You have !”

"Yes; once or twice at Mrs. Wills' house."

George turned away: he was not angry now: those words somehow had fallen too heavily and deeply to rouse anger. It was all over then, she had seen him more than once; could speak of it quietly; well, he had expected it, and could bear it. He sat down in his big chair, and tried to speak to her calmly.

"I think, Margaret, that you should have been more frank; it is hardly—well to act so entirely on your own responsibility. I have tried to be your friend, have sometimes thought that you would give me your confidence—no, do not interrupt me,—you think I am selfish, like all the world, and had my own object, and my own plans in trying to gain that confidence; perhaps I had, but it is past now, I put it aside. I had hoped you might think of me as an elder brother, knowing more of the world and of people than you do, have thought me able to assist you, perhaps to direct you at times; but you have always regarded me with mistrust, Margaret, instead."

"No, no; you have been so kind——"

George waved his hand impatiently.

"There it is, there is your mistake; you thank me for what no thanks are due; but where you should have been grateful, where a kindness should have

been recognised, you give no return of confidence, no kindly feeling. I bring to you an offering that costs me five shillings, and you are all gratitude. I offer you the devotion of my life, and you make a return of mistrust, coldness, almost dislike at times. I tell you, Miss Hall, you have not treated me fairly."

"How did I know that—that you noticed or cared—or that you—"

"That I loved you! No, I did not want you to know that. But you did—ah, Margaret, you blush, there was a meaning then in all this coldness, this indifference; you knew at first you could never care for me, and you would not encourage me?"

"No, Mr. Iliffe, do not think better of me than I deserve. If I have been unkind and cold, and distant, to so true a friend—and thinking of it now I feel I have been—you must put it down to my nature, I think. I am hardly friends with myself, I am discontented, and on bad terms with all the world."

Margaret's lips trembled, and she did not conclude her unfinished speech.

"Dear Margaret," George said, "you could not help it. I think it is fate. But give me at least the right still to befriend you. I am your elder

brother; nay, Margaret, do not be distressed, there is nothing to grieve for; you have acted quite rightly, it was only I that was in fault. I should have known you could never change; that I had too few attractions, not even youth, to effect that change in my favour. Do not be unhappy, forget it, Margaret. I did not mean that you should know."

For Margaret, moved from her apparent indifference by the cherished affection and care thus revealed to her, and perhaps wound up to extra excitement by the late anxiety, had broken down suddenly into tears, and stood with her hands before her face, sobbing. It was hard for George, sitting at the other side of the table, to watch her thus: to see that grief, and not be able to assuage it. But he let the storm pass by, and waited till she would listen to him composedly.

"Now, Margaret, let me have the opportunity of counselling without offending you. You tell me you have met Frank Miles. Was it by appointment?"

"Oh, no; it was the merest chance. He knows Mr. Wills, and is there sometimes when I give my lesson to the children."

"And you speak to him?"

"Not always."

"But he comes there to see you."

"Not that I know of."

"It can be for nothing else, Margaret; you must leave that place; if you go there he will think you encourage him, and will persevere with his attentions."

Margaret was glad to see that it never seemed to occur to Mr. Iliffe, that those visits could be anything but disagreeable to her; so she encouraged the idea, and said yes, she had thought of it, though she certainly had not.

So poor George went on with his counsel and his warnings, and Margaret listened to him; but, as usual with such warnings, they carried with them so much of the prejudices of him who warned, that they were listened to rather out of courtesy than anything else, and I fear did not leave much impression on Margaret's mind.

CHAPTER XVII.

FRANK'S MISGIVINGS.

MR. FRANCIS was late home from the factory, and it was dark before he got there. Pausing at the drawing-room door with his hand upon the lock, he heard the twang of Mr. Charlton's guitar inside, and being in no humour for that gentleman's society, he passed on through the house to his own studio. There he found a bright fire already burning, and shutting the door he drew up his arm-chair to the hearth, glad of the prospect of a little solitude and quiet, after the day's business and noise at the mill.

Frank was not happy; somehow the confidence with which he had contemplated the future was failing: looking back and studying his position he felt things were not progressing as he had hoped they would do, that Margaret was growing more distant, not more friendly: he could not disguise from himself the fact that each time she treated him more

coldly, nay, might even possibly refuse to see him at all.

Did she still love him? Had she ever really loved him? If so, hers was scarcely a nature to cherish a grudge against him for what had happened. But there lay that doubt in his path; there lay an uncomfortable knowledge that when Margaret's trouble came upon her, another took the position that should have been his, and had helped her, had been her friend. Gratitude was a strong feeling—but was there no stronger? “Surely,” Frank thought, “there must be some tie between them, or that fellow would never have dared to send back that insolent answer in her name by Mr. Fairly. And yet I can't believe it; he marry Margaret! my Margaret! By God! it maddens me to think of it; if she won't have me I shall be off again; I can't stop to see it played out. It was my only inducement to come home, and if it fails me I will go farther afield this time. And if it is so, if her objection to my presence is really a dislike, and not, as I have fancied it, a mistaken notion she had of what was due to herself, why it is my duty to rid her of it. If she is engaged to Mr. Iliffe, confound him! it can't be very pleasant to have me hanging about, so I'll try my fate—any-

thing would be better than this; and if she refuses me, as I daresay she may—why it would have had to come some time, and may as well come now as six months hence. It will be hard, but I suppose I can bear it; at any rate, I shall have the satisfaction of knowing it was my own fault to begin with."

Frank laughed bitterly, a sad, mirthless laugh; the prospect he had looked forward to had seemed so happy, and the one he thought now as more likely, was so desolate, that he was hardly stoic enough as yet, to regard the contrast with composure. So he fell into a long train of recollections, of Mary Rueby, of himself, of bygone follies and failings; thinking over some with passionate regret for the shadows they cast on him still, and owning that he had not much to pride himself on in review, till a knock at the door roused him, and going to it, he found Mr. Candy Miles standing out in the moonlight.

It was not often the master found his way there, and Frank was surprised to see him.. Mr. Miles came in, and looking round smiled to see the litter of painting materials, books, &c., that lay about.

"Rather in a mess," he said; "been doing any painting lately?"

"No; I have scarcely touched a brush for the last two or three months."

Mr. Miles managed to navigate successfully to the fireplace, and found a seat there.

"How is it, Frank, that you are not with your friend, Mr. Charlton? I heard him as I came past."

"He and I do not chum well together; never did. He prefers the society in the drawing-room to mine, and I can't stand that infernal guitar of his," Frank said.

"Is he a fool?" asked the master innocently.

"No, most decidedly not; you should see Augustus argue a point with his tailor: his eloquence is quite edifying. But we all have our weak points," Mr. Francis said with magnanimous frankness; "and dress and show are his. This little quiet affair he gets up now, is nothing to what he affected a couple of years back, after his journey to Seville. I have seen him sit down in the presence of a whole roomful, and thrum away at the guitar in a velvet jacket, broad blue ribbon over his shoulder and with his head thrown back, till I was ashamed of owning him."

Frank remembered having made a sketch of him in that position, adding a blackened face and striped red shirt by way of colour, and the remembrance tickled him.

The master watched him laughing.

" You have made some other acquaintance lately that please you better, Frank," he said with his eyes upon him.

Mr. Francis met the look, and catching at the meaning therein conveyed, defiantly threw down the gauntlet before his father should have time.

" No, I've been renewing an old acquaintance, father, instead," he replied quickly.

" So I hear, and I want to know what you mean in that quarter," the old man said sternly.

" What I mean ? "

" Yes. A lad doesn't follow a girl about as you have done Margaret Hall since you came home, without some object."

Frank's face flushed.

" I can only have one meaning if I have been doing so," he said.

" And what may that be, pray ? " asked Mr. Candy Miles, with a sneer.

" If she can forget what has gone by, and if she still cares for me, to carry out the engagement you made for us, sir." Frank spoke steadily, determined to be unmoved by his father's contempt.

" Damn it, Frank, she's too poor."

" Well, sir ? "

" Why, you can't marry her. If things had

happened differently, you would have been obliged to fulfil your promise, poor or not ; but as it is, the idea of a new engagement is ridiculous."

" I make no new one, father ; I only carry out my old one. It was made, and poverty can make no difference."

" If the girl has a remnant of her old pride, she won't accept you," the master said.

" It depends how I put it. If I say, ' This engagement has been made, and I know in honour I am bound to keep it in spite of altered fortune : ' if I make it a matter of duty, she will refuse me, of course, and I should honour her for it."

" However you might disguise it, that would be the true feeling. Come, Frank, my lad, don't sacrifice yourself to a mistaken notion of honour and duty ; leave things as they are."

" But am I to be allowed no feeling in the matter ? " broke out Frank, with a tremor in his voice, and his eyes bent on the fire. " You cannot think, father, that I entered into that engagement now more than two years back, without some love for Margaret ? " Looking up for a moment he caught the master looking at him, and smiling, and it fired his blood. " You are thinking of what occurred ten months ago ; I tell you, father, I

never loved Margaret more dearly than when I knew I had lost her," he cried, passionately ; "I never loved her before as I love her now. I go and see her, and hang about the place where she is, and invent all sorts of excuses to be near her, because she is all that makes life dear, because I cherish the hope that she may in time forget all that has happened, and will fulfil our engagement."

Six months ago Mr. Miles would have treated this declaration with easy indifference, and having no belief in his son's constancy and stability of purpose, would have called it a passing infatuation, that would only exist as long as it was opposed. But the last six months had very considerably changed his opinion ; he had discovered that Frank could stick to a thing when he had a mind, and could be very obstinate and determined in the pursuance of his object. The master had been master so long, that when the heir apparent began to show a little of the paternal spirit, and insist on his rights as a man, it struck him as being a new idea, and one to put down at once while yet in its infancy, with a strong hand.

"And how long is it since you have made up your mind to this desirable point?" he asked.

"It was my sole reason for coming back at all."

"You should have been more open with me," the master said quietly, "and we should have started on fairer ground by knowing what we were doing. I thought you had forgotten all about this thing. Better take my advice, and leave it alone." Frank shook his head.

"One thing, sir, I will promise you, that I will do nothing secretly. I knew Mr. Wills would tell you of my calls at his house—it is the only chance I have of seeing Margaret—or I should have done so myself. You shall know everything I do; but, beyond that I must be left to my own judgment and discretion."

"And mind you let her know who she is marrying. If you do this against my wish you must take the consequences."

"I do not think my position will make much difference with Margaret," said Mr. Francis with a smile.

"I don't know that. It is fair she should have the means of weighing the advantages you can offer against her other sweetheart. He gets a good salary, I believe," said the master maliciously, and eyeing his son with a curious, half-mocking expression of countenance.

"You have been listening to some of Mr. Wills's lies, I suppose, father."

"How do you know them to be lies? Has the girl told you so?"

"Told me so! You don't know how distantly we are placed; what a wide breach there is between us. Here we are talking of the consequences of my marrying a lady who now will scarcely speak to me, who avoids me whenever she can, and hesitates about entering a room where she sees I am. Surely it is very premature; perhaps I shall never get any nearer to her, she may have cast me out, as I deserve: and yet you fancy me talking to her about a rival!"

"Then, for all you know, he may stand on a nearer footing than even Wills says, and your chance is already gone," said the master, surveying the young man as he strode to and fro among the rubbish scattered about, agitated and excited, flushed with contending feelings. "I believe it is a favourite consolation with young ladies to take a new sweet-heart when they are out of temper with their old one."

"If it is so; if she cares for this man—I don't know who he is, but he must be an unprincipled fellow to pay court to a lady already engaged—I shall not interfere, I've made my bed, at least chance had a good hand in it (but that doesn't count, I

suppose, when a fellow has done wrong), and I must lie on it. If she prefers him I can only hope she will be happy, as happy as she deserves, and go away where I shan't see her."

He was speaking in quick, agitated tones, and as he finished sat down at the table resting his head on his hands. His father still watching him, noticed almost for the first time, now the light was upon him, how jaded and oldened he looked, and what deep lines his illness had left upon his face. The old man forgot for a moment the discussion and his displeasure, in his care for his boy, and came and laid his hand upon his shoulder quite tenderly.

"Don't agitate yourself, my lad; you are not strong, and will be ill again if you don't take care," he said kindly.

"Dear father, do the best you can for me, and make my peace with Margaret. Never mind after times; I daresay I can push my way as other men have done, if I have an object in doing so. But a word from you might heal the breach. I cannot say it, as you can. It is the only thing that can make me happy; don't refuse it me."

"Nonsense, lad, I can't ask a penniless girl to marry my son; she'd think me mad. Here, leave

the subject for to-night. I came to fetch you into the drawing-room; there is no one with the lasses but that little snob."

Mr. Francis rose, and they went out together round the house to the door. The moon was overcast, dark, troubled clouds were hurrying across the sky, obscuring its light, and a fresh brisk wind was rising and already rustling through the leafy trees.

"We shall have a storm," said Frank, stopping to watch the clouds as they clustered more closely, and grew more dense.

They found Mr. Charlton and the Misses Miles deep in a discussion on the subject of ladies' dresses. Going in softly, they did not disturb the trio seated very close together at the fireplace, and the master with the most mischievous twinkle in his eyes, put up his finger as an intimation to Frank to be quiet: so they remained standing unnoticed at the farther end of the large room.

"There are some exceptions, I am aware," Mr. Augustus was saying, twirling his exquisite chin tuft with his taper fingers; "but as a rule, the way the English women dress is absurd—really now, 'pon my soul, it is. I took notes; gad, it was quite a study, while I was waiting in the carriage this morning, of the ladies as they went past me."

"We will not take you to town, Mr. Charlton, if that is the way you amuse yourself, while we are shopping," said Miss Miles, with an *esprit* that quite astonished her respected father, and made him shake his head and moralize, to the effect that it is rarely we know even those with whom we are brought most directly in contact.

"We will leave you in the carriage up some back street," chimed in Miss Eliza, "with especial injunctions regarding Fido."

"Thank you, Miss Eliza, I am not, ah! not generally—'pon my soul—fond of dogs. Fido and I had quite an interesting little fight this morning, begad, among the cushions; but the arena was small, too small for the combat. Well, as we were arguing, I assure you, from my observatory, viz. the carriage window, I saw the most extraordinary combinations of colour you can conceive. How women of education and taste can commit such enormities really puzzles me; 'pon my soul it does."

"And how do you account for it?"

"Only in one way, I suppose, Miss Miles. A lady goes into a shop; she has a dress at home, say orange colour, and wants a cloak to suit. Now, her Parisian fashion book tells her a deep green or an intense black is the right colour to match with it,

and she goes into the shop with the intention of following its dictates. She expresses her wishes; the shopman is overcome with regret, but really he is afraid his mantillas of either of the colours desired are all gone, or too hopelessly insignificant to suit the lady. But in default there has just arrived—never been opened an hour—direct from Paris, a superb cloak of a delicate mouse colour, that she really must see. Now mark her fatal indecision; instead of turning away and going into the next shop that contains exactly what she wants, she thinks she will just see the production in question. She follows the man with the cloak, and is lost; five minutes later a garment, quite unsuited to any dress or bonnet she possesses, is put into her carriage, actually, 'pon my soul! to be worn."

" You have evidently studied the question deeply, Mr. Charlton," said the master, coming forward.

" Ah, gad ! 'pon my soul! no idea you were there."

" Thank you; don't move: I'm not staying. But I think you are quite right—quite right."

Mr. Charlton did not sufficiently know the master to read the meaning conveyed in the smile with which he was being complimented; but even that self-satisfied young gentleman felt hardly comfortable under the notice he had secured; and, as

he said next morning at the club, “ ‘Gad ! the master up there is a monstrous clever fellow, ’pon my soul ! but a little queer ; and a fellow never knows, begad ! when he is making fun of him or not—chaffing him, you know, Toady, my boy. Those low-born fellows are always at some game, begad ! Don’t think I shall go there again ; the girls are very civil, of course, but Frank is a damned young snob ! ”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OLD LOVE.

MARGARET was in an indignant, virtuous, and of course, highly creditable state of feeling. For the last two months, almost every time she went to teach the juvenile Willses, there was sure to be a gentleman she had once known, there too. She had endeavoured, of course, to show him that his presence was most objectionable to her on such occasions; she had comported herself with the greatest coldness and stateliness towards him ; had seldom given more than a single word in reply to his questions, and had, indeed, lately only signified her knowledge of his presence at all by the faintest bow in the world. But he refused to take the hint. Whatever pretext he found for his conduct it is very sure that continually there he was.

He occupied himself in various ways while there : he studied a large historical painting against the wall, perhaps not exactly with a view of purchasing it,

as Mrs. Wills supposed, but certainly with a great deal of interest ; rather remarkable, considering that it was bad and very uninteresting, and Mr. Francis Miles was supposed to have a considerable knowledge of the fine arts. Nevertheless there he was, and Margaret had at length come to the determination to avoid him, even if she were obliged, in doing so, to give up her engagement at No. 9 altogether.

You see, my dear reader, that Margaret had taken herself in hand. It was all very well to have thought of him regretfully and fondly when he was away, and there was no chance of her being called upon to explain her feelings towards him ; but now that he was at hand, now that any day he might express a wish for the renewal of their engagement, it was necessary to consider what path it was consistent with her dignity to tread, and to resolve to walk in the same all the days of her life. So she had found the path, and had protected it on either side by such high hedges of pride, and prejudice, and self-denial, that it was almost impossible for Happiness, who is proverbially short-sighted, even to look over at her, and so narrowly bounded in her view, that she would not see a brighter horizon beaming for her not far off, and upon which, indeed, she-

was most obstinately and resolutely turning her back.

It is all very well so to go through life with a path marked out; it has the advantage, if you stick to it, of keeping you from odd pitfalls and false places; but it is as well to be quite sure that the path is really the right one before you start. Because it is a dreary road, and one grows very, very weary while traversing it; because along that road, life may convert itself into a burden, and insist on being carried and borne on weary shoulders, and will not bear its own weight and give the traveller a rest at all; because there are no weeds on that arid path, no traces of graceful uselessness, nor yet any flowers to relieve the eye, and make the traveller pause to admire their treacherous beauty; because the feet bleed as they go over the stones, and heart and soul grow weary of the white hard track, and send a cry up to God to have it ended; these are no proofs that the road is a righteous one, and a good one, and that it is a holy thing to make our lives unhappy. When we see such paths persevered in, maybe we look on in awe at the noble self-denial of the pilgrim; but surely we had better see why he treads this path before we give our admiration and applause. If a life of sacrifice be

necessary, why, God speed thee on the journey ; but I think, not seldom, some weak pride or prejudice has very much influence in the matter, and that, after the fashion of Margaret, many mark themselves out a life of self-denial and very meagre enjoyments, through some mistaken conception of what is due to their own dignity.

Having come to this very fixed determination, it was rather unfortunate that on her way to lessons that afternoon, she should meet Mr. Francis Miles, and that that gentleman should overlook her evident intention of passing him, and insist instead on walking along beside her. Of course she did not want him, of course she wished he would go, but she could hardly suggest that to him, and must content herself with being as uncivil as possible.

He waited till they had passed out of the busy street in which he had met her, and continued walking with his eyes bent on the ground, seemingly lost in thought, and twisting his tawny moustache into tapered spiral points.

“ Margaret,” he said at last, “ it is now nearly ten months since our engagement was first broken off. Is it not ? ”

He had no right to call her Margaret, no right to mention their engagement at all ; so, to punish him,

she said in the most indifferent manner she could assume, "that really she did not know, it might be."

"Do you not, Margaret? Have you forgotten it so soon, then? I had hoped that you would have remembered it, have thought more of it."

"I am not aware of having given you any reason to suppose so, Mr. Miles," said Margaret, with the most appropriate hauteur.

Frank gave a bitter little laugh.

"No, Margaret, you certainly never did. Indeed I must compliment you on the unvarying incivility with which you have treated me, and the plainness with which you have intimated that all advances on my part were unwelcome."

If he felt this, what more did he want? Why could not he go and be satisfied? Margaret looked at him with no little trepidation; what did he mean?

"Nevertheless, I have refused to believe what you have taken so much trouble to assure me of, and want to be told in words whether you can forgive me or not. I have acted wrongly towards you, but not so wrongly as you suppose; you have probably heard exaggerated accounts, there have been several kind mutual friends who have probably kept you informed on the subject of my wrong-doing. But they could not have told you of my remorse, my

deep repentance, only the worst side has been shown you ; but it hardly matters, if you still care for me, you will take me even after that, and if you do not, no explanations will suffice."

"I did not think, sir, after what has passed," she said firmly, and not at all moved by his agitation, "that you would insult me with speaking of the relationship in which formerly we stood to each other."

"Insult you, Miss Hall ! If it is an insult to tell you that I love you, God help me ! Can you not forgive my one fault ? Is it not enough that I love you, have loved you long since ? You have thought me neglectful ; ah, Margaret ! I dared not come to you with that stain fresh upon me. I was ill and like to die ; but you cannot know, when your great trouble came, how hard it was to keep from you, how hard I struggled with myself, feeling I had no right to intrude upon you then, to insult you with my presence after what had happened ; yet I would have given all the world to have come to you then."

"The pain is past now, do not recall it."

"How can I forgive myself for having added to that pain ? for having rendered myself unworthy to help you ? But you will forget it, Margaret ; it

is past, and we will look only to the future; and if a life of love and devotion can erase my fault, it shall, Margaret; we may be so happy still."

He looked anxiously into her face to find his answer there, but she turned it from him; his words must not change her, there was the path straight, hard, and distinct: why hesitate at the corner? It had to be trod, so let there be no wavering. What if life should be rendered a blank by the one little word she was resolved to utter, surely it would be preferable to losing one iota of the dignity she so prided herself on.

"Mr. Francis, better leave things as they are," she said; "our positions are altered, mine is to work. We must never be anything but friends, now."

"Yes, indeed, we must, Margaret. Can you not trust me and my love? Can you not forgive me?"

"I cannot forget that I am poor, and that you are—rich!"

"I rich! my dear Margaret, I haven't a hundred pounds in the world to call my own," said Frank. "There is a novel inducement for a man to offer."

"The more reason why you should not offend your father. Does he know of this?"

"Yes," said Frank.

“But he cannot agree to what you propose.”

“Why not?”

Frank was unwilling to pursue this part of the argument; he dreaded Margaret's pride on this point more than any other, and now that it seemed likely she would decide in his favour, he was afraid of this phase of the case being enlarged on.

“Your sisters cut me in the street,” said Margaret, bitterly. “Mr. Augustus Charlton, walking with them, surveys me through his eyeglass and curls his exquisite chintuft, as though he did not know me. I am too poor for them to know; surely I am too poor for Mr. Candy Miles to recognize as your wife.”

“My father will scarcely oppose what is so necessary to my happiness—at least not for long.” Frank replied, still evasively.

“But he does object now. Mr. Miles is not a man to change; he has spoken to you about this, and you make this offer to me under the penalty of losing your rightful inheritance?”

“To be frank with you, then, Margaret—and I owe it to you now to be very open and keep nothing back—it would make a difference; my father hardly sees my act in the light I do, and as he will presently.”

"Mr. Francis," Margaret said steadily, "our former engagement can never be renewed; we will part now, and for ever."

"Margaret! in God's name, no!" cried Frank, with sudden dismay; "you cannot mean it. What is money to me, and position, without you to share it. Better my father cast me out of doors altogether than be the cause of those words. Margaret, reconsider them; don't say hastily what will blight my whole life!"

"I am resolved. You make this sacrifice because you think you are bound in honour to me."

"There is no sacrifice. Do I not love you? Is not all I care for in life bound up in you? and yet to put in a miserable consideration of money! Besides, you look at the case wrongly. My position is not what you think it is; I may not inherit all my father might otherwise leave me, but that will scarcely make any difference; he is stronger than I am and may most likely outlive me; at any rate there can be so little difference between us, that it can scarcely matter. But he will not alter my position at the mill; I work hard and draw out my pay like any 'hand' there. I no longer receive my father's bounty for nothing, so am independent and free to do as I like."

But Margaret was firm ; now there was another reason, and a better one, why she should reject him ; a reason in which her own pride did not hold so prominent a position ; a reason that was all the stronger because she loved him, and it was no shame to own it. She would give him up ; she would not accept the sacrifice he would have made for her, but she might still think very kindly of him.

He would get over his fancy, she said, kindly finding him consolation after the usual manner of her sex.

“ Shall I ? ” said Frank, sadly. “ As usual, you do me injustice, Miss Hall ; my life will be very desolate.”

Margaret had almost said, “ And what will mine be ? ” but she checked herself in time, and chose an answer more suitable.

“ You have no idea how soon you will get over it,” she said lightly, and as though she were offering consolation for the loss of a favourite neckerchief or brooch. “ Gentlemen don’t pine away now-a-days, as we had used to read of ; they are more philosophical, I suppose, and if they can’t get one thing they take another, and like it just as well. You have so many other amusements to divert your attention from a poor music-teacher.”

Frank did not answer ; he let her go on mocking him, as it were, and scarcely heeded her : now that the die was cast, he was looking back at past hopes thus crushed, at plans treasured up and thought of fondly, all connected with her and all brushed away now. Very soon she would go away, and then he must never seek her again ; must go where he might never see her. He was scarcely angry with his father for having put a barrier in his path, already difficult enough. He said bitterly, that “ Margaret only wanted a good excuse to turn me away, so she hunted out this one and made it serve. Had she loved me she would not have cared ; she would have known money could not make my happiness.”

“ Your lady friends will doubtless console you,” Margaret was saying, when he roused himself ; and indeed, only he had not heard, she had been running on with a train of the usual female logic, as regarded the constancy of the other sex, for the last five minutes in a most spirited manner. “ The ladies are invariably kind in such matters, and offer consolation of the most endearing kind, with lavish prodigality.”

“ I have not found them very kind.”

“ Perhaps you have not sought them sufficiently,”

the tormentor went on. "Do so now: state your case; depict your unhappy position, and——"

"Stop," growled out Frank; "don't torture me in this way. I have offered you what every man has a right to offer, an honest love. You had a right to reject it, I suppose, but not to mock me—not to degrade me!"

Margaret's heart beat faster, and the tears came thick and fast into her eyes. "What right have I," thought she, "to give him pain? O God! if I might take his hand and ask him to forgive me —ask him not to think too hardly of me!" She felt stricken at heart at the sight of this great sorrow, and the knowledge that it was her work.

"I was only suggesting the readiest mode of cure," she said, humbly.

"Which you have tried yourself, Miss Hall, and found infallible," cried Frank. "I have been a fool to suppose I could have a chance when pitted against Mr. George Iliffe. See, we are at Mr. Wills's now. Don't be afraid, Miss Hall, I am not coming in. I am going away, and will not trouble you again, nor persecute you any more. But tell me one thing before I go—nay, I demand it as a right, to know who is successful where I

have so signally failed. In what relationship does Mr. Iliffe stand to you?"

"He is my mother's friend."

"But to you? He is a very dear one to you?"

Margaret looked at him with her accustomed frankness.

"Mr. Miles, if people have coupled my name with Mr. Iliffe's, I tell you that we are nothing more than distant friends, and never can be."

They had reached Mr. Wills's gate, and she held out her hand. He took it and retained it in his a moment, looking into her face.

"I must see you again, Margaret, before I go for good," he said.

She shook her head, and turned in at the gate.

CHAPTER XIX.

BROUGHT LOW.

"GILBERT, have you heard of Mr. Grummitt lately?" said Mr. Francis, one morning at the mill.

Yes; Gilbert had been to see him a few days back.

"How is the poor fellow?"

Gilbert shook his head.

"It has been a near escape for him, sir," he said.

"Did they knock him about much, then?"

"No; but the fright and all together brought on brain fever, and he was a raving madman for some time. His sister has had a hard time of it in nursing him."

"His sister! Has such a wretch any womankind belonging to him?" asked Frank.

"She is not good to look at," Gilbert said, "but she has stuck to that scamp of a brother like a brick. He is no easy subject to attend to when he is sick; but she does it all alone, and never complains."

"You have been there several times, then; why did you not tell me?"

"They were starving, sir. The hands took every halfpenny, and no one would trust them; even the doctor, seeing no chance of getting paid, was chary of his visits."

"And they came to you?"

"No, sir, I heard they were doing badly, so I went to see them, and did what I could for him. I think some little allowance might be made for him, sir. He has fallen so low, one must needs pity him; and I doubt if he will ever be fit for work again. He was never very strong, and now cannot use his legs at all without crutches. He wants to get out of the town as soon as possible, for no one will trust him here, and do something for a living he knows he must."

Mr. Francis, up on his high stool at his desk on which he was balancing a series of rulers, pen-holders, &c., listened with the greatest complacency. It was a bad trait in that young man's character, but Frank was essentially human, and if I try for a moment to throw over him a garb proclaiming him sainted, immaculate, and in every way fit to be my hero, he straightway brings forward some sentiment most decidedly of the earth—earthy, and puts my

little theory to flight. In the present case his enemy had fallen low and was suffering ; he would help him, would bring the wine and the oil and succour him ; but he could not be sorry the evil had come to pass, and did not love him a bit more.

“ Don’t let him want anything, Gilbert,” he says ; “ he is bad enough, God knows, but if he needs help so much let him have it ; and when he is strong enough to go, I will find what may be necessary to send him off comfortably, and shall consider myself a public benefactor for ridding the town of such a fellow.”

“ And I will tell him it comes from you ? ”

“ As you like. Don’t be too hard on him ; he has had a good deal lately, and he is too low to kick now.”

“ He thinks you had something to do with the rising of the hands that night, and I cannot convince him to the contrary.”

Frank laughed, and his construction having come to a speedy downfall, he descended from his elevated position, and turned off into the mill.

When Gilbert went according to promise that same evening, he found Grimmitt had left his bed, and was sitting in the kitchen by the fire. He looked very bad, very pale and worn and pinched,

and leant back feebly in his chair, with scarce strength enough to turn his head and greet his visitor.

Grissel, waiting attendance on him, said he was much better, and would soon be well now; but Gilbert, scanning him carefully, held a different opinion, and taking Grissel aside questioned her more closely.

"He wants to get away so much," she said, "he is so nervous and frightened. That awful night is always before him—always coming back to him, and he starts up at all times and hours, and screams that they are at the door."

"He still suffers with his head, then?"

"Yes, very much. The doctor says he will always be subject to those nervous fancies, but I hope they will not return so often when he gets a little stronger, he is so weak now."

"I have spoken to Mr. Francis as you wished," Gilbert said.

"Is he still so very bitter against my poor brother? I don't think he would be if he could see him now. James 'll never be able to do anybody much ill or good again."

"No, he spoke kindly of him. You do my young master a great injustice if you think he still wishes

your brother ill. He says when the doctor thinks he can be moved with safety, that I must manage to get him away for you."

The tall gaunt woman looked quickly at Gilbert, and shrank back against the wall ; there were tears in her eyes.

" You are very kind," she said, in a broken voice, " very kind ; we—we should have starved if it hadn't been for you——"

" Tush ! " replied Gilbert, turning away. " Grimmitt is calling you."

Grissel went to her brother, and leaning over his chair whispered something in his ear. He did not catch it at first, he had grown very slow of thought since his illness, and it took him some time to understand her.

" Eh, what—go away ? yes, we'll go at once," he said, at last, and pushed her away. " Mr. Farrel, Mr. Farrel."

Gilbert came and sat down by him.

" You'll get me away, will you ? " he said, clutching his arm ; " you'll see it is all right before we start, they may be waiting, you know, round the corner ; they are very sly, and keep very quiet, though there are so many."

" Yes," said Gilbert, humouring the fancy, for he

did not half like the state of nervous excitement into which the intelligence just afforded, had thrown the patient, and which seemed to give a momentary power to the feeble trembling limbs, and an energy to the dull eyes. "Yes, I will see that it is all right before you start."

"God bless you! they won't hurt you; they always liked you, Mr. Farrel, and they never did me," cried Grimmitt, with his old cringing manner; "and you'll come down with me just to be sure; there's no trusting them, you know; they'll promise you one thing and do the contrary all the while, they are so false."

"You needn't be afraid this time, Mr. Grimmitt."

"Ah, thank you, you are very kind, very kind! I shouldn't mind, you know, only I'm so very weak, and—and the money, Mr. Farrel, I haven't a half-penny, they took it all, every bit; at least——" he stopped, catching Grissel's eye watching him, and added, quickly, "yes, they took it all—all."

"Mr. Francis said I was to give you ten pounds to get away with."

"Ah! did he, did he?" Grimmitt replied, rubbing his hands as though the mention of money made them itch; "tell him I'm much obliged and thankful. And you brought it with you?"

Gilbert put his hand in his pocket to get out his book, but Grissel interposed,—

“ You must not give it to him,” she said.

“ Why not? ”

“ I shall never be able to get it from him again if you do ; he’d rather starve than give me money for a loaf, if he once gets it. He got hold of some of the other you left, Mr. Farrel, and I couldn’t get it off him to pay for his own medicine, so he went without.”

“ Well, my dear, but I only want to save, you are so extravagant ; if it is ever so little, it is always best to save,” Grimmitt said, glowering at her with all his feeble power. “ And yet it is no good, no good,” he added, with a despairing cry and clasping his hands ; “ they’d come and take it again, as they took it then, the savings of years all gone—all gone! ”

“ Yes ; that’s what saving comes to,” retorted Grissel.

Grimmitt shrank back into his chair looking at her.

“ That is how she frightens me,” he gasped out to Gilbert ; “ if I don’t do just as she wants, she frightens me with them, and I wake in the night in a cold sweat and think they are at the door, and hear them rapping to come in. I think they are there sometimes ; she lets them in, and they come round the

bed and look at me, and if I wasn't so very weak they'd fall on me again. Hush! isn't there some one coming up the court? No, no, sit still, Mr. Farrel, dear Mr. Farrel, don't leave me, they won't hurt me if you are there; you'd stop them, wouldn't you? You'd always a good heart ——. Did you hear, Gilbert, what I did when they were at the door? I threw a bucket of water on the fire and got up the chimney, it was wide and roomy, and I'm not very big, but it almost choked me, and then the fire came up; but I hardly felt it, I thought I was dying, it was awful—awful! Grissel says I tumbled down, but I don't remember it, and think she must have pulled me down for spite, for I locked her out, and she got in for it, and she's very sly—very sly—”

He stopped and fell back, the sweat standing in big beads on his face with the effort of talking, and Gilbert turned from him in disgust. He could forgive anything in the miserable wretch before him but his thorough mistrust of the faithful creature who had borne so much for him, and was so faithful and true through all. Grissel, catching his look, smiled a little.

“ He is always so,” she said, “ always suspecting and mistrusting me. He half believes I took the money from him when he was insensible, and has

threatened and coaxed me to give it up to him : he says I have it hid somewhere, and when he first knew it was gone it was awful to see him. He brought on a fit by his violence, and foamed at the mouth like a mad dog. He's quiet enough now, he's too weak to kill a fly, but the will isn't wanting if he had the strength. See, he's quite spent now with talking."

Gilbert rose, and looking once more at the poor bent figure in the chair, went to the door, and beckoning Grissel to him, put some money in her hand.

"Where are you going when you leave here ? Have you any place in view ?"

"My brother has three little cottages in Birmingham, that came to him at my mother's death, and we thought of going to live in one of those. I shall do what I can with taking in washing, and so manage to live somehow. He'll never be fit for work again."

"You go with him, then ? "

A softer, sadder expression came over the hard lined face than it was wont to wear, and she said in a low voice,—

"I shall be with him till he dies ; he has no one else to help him now he has fallen so low, and he was kind to me when I wanted kindness."

The hardest, and sternest, and cruelest of us, have our moments of emotion and gentleness ; they come when we are ill of body, and weary and sick of mind most likely, but still they come, and fall like rays of sunlight upon our dark lives. Grissel Grimmitt, hard-hearted, ill-featured and ill-grained, heedless of all the world, and hating all the world, still cherished as pure and unselfish a love as did ever tender lady. She could never get anything but hard words for her pains ; to the end of the chapter, it would always be mistrust, and poverty, and neglect ; but she clung to him, careless of herself and comfort ; and let us trust her strong love would prove as a kindly cloak for her other vices, when she should come to be judged by One above earthly prejudices.

CHAPTER XX.

HONEST DODGING.

IT will be readily believed that though Mary Rueby had been received home, and was reinstated in her old position there, that, as regarded the neighbours, her position was anything but an agreeable one. It was a little undefined, regarded with a little suspicion, and though they were by no means hardly disposed towards her, yet a careless remark or heedless word would fall now and then, such as brought the colour into her cheek, and struck her with a sense of degradation, that was none the more easy to bear because she was conscious of deserving it.

She had grown to think of Mr. Francis as almost a dream of the past; what love she may have borne him—if, indeed, such a poor, vain fancy as hers had been, could be called love—she had learnt to stifle; yet she could not altogether bear to hear his name without some little flutter, and its bringing back a whole world of past hopes, and fears, and struggles,

in which there lay a pain yet in the remembrance.

Esther, knowing this, felt it could never be altered while Mary was still in Manchester, and propounded to her mother the advisability of sending her away; but Mrs. Rueby, never very remarkable for her ready wit under difficulties, thought the present one insurmountable, and shook her head despondingly.

It is certain that Esther never mentioned her views on the subject to Gilbert Farrel, but it is not impossible her mother may have done; at any rate, that gentleman, catching at the idea instantly, thought that if properly worked it might be carried out to the advantage of the whole family, and might be the best means of "doing something for those people," as the master—repentant of his former hastiness or actuated by an intense desire to get them out of the town—had bid him.

A few days later, and Gilbert had so far put the idea to a practical test, as to call on John with an offer. He stated that there was a small farmer at S—— who needed a head man to look over the farm labourers, and who was to bring a little money into the concern, and so have a share in the proceeds. John rubbed his head, brought out a long yarn as to the recommendations he could bring to back up

his own assertion of his skill as a farmer, swore Mr. Candy Miles was a gentleman, and seized Gilbert's hand.

"There is a good cottage for you to tenant, and Mary and the lad can help on the farm."

It was a good offer, and no mistake, and John was about to pour forth his sentiments in a rapturous strain,—"for thee sees it's som'ert different from takin' money"—when a recollection came across him, bringing a very unmistakable look of dismay on his face.

"But there be Esther, Mister Farrel, she'll none let me tak't; she's awful to know if thee speaks o' giving anythin'."

"I'll manage Esther," said Gilbert, "if you'll give me your word."

John gave that readily enough, and went off home to tell his wife.

Gilbert having undertaken to bring round to reason the most obstinate member of the family, was, of course, compelled to go and meet her for that purpose the next Saturday afternoon, when she came from work, and to propose a little walk, to give him time to explain. By the way, I have a strong suspicion this was not the first time, by any means, that he had so waylaid her; or, if so, she took it

very coolly, and did not offer the faintest objection to the proceeding.

"Esther," began the diplomatist, after a little deliberation as to how he should begin, and deciding, as many a diplomatist has done before him, on a course a little wide of the real mark, "I find, to my deep regret, that for the last seven years, I have been the victim of a most systematic and deliberate course of daily thieving!"

"Good gracious, Mr. Farrel!"

"It is true, I assure you," resumed Gilbert, shaking his head in a very solemn and impressive manner, "so true, that it is only a wonder that by this time I am not reduced to a state of utter destitution in consequence of it."

Esther did not know whether he was in fun or earnest, so was determined, with her usual discretion, to be on the safe side, and not express any sympathy or incredulity till she was more certain that he would not laugh at her; so she preserved the most provoking silence.

"Or perhaps I may be mistaken, and it is my own voracious appetite that deceives me," Gilbert went on, in a melancholy way. "Would it be likely that a man could get over a leg of mutton weighing eight pounds two ounces, a large piece of sirloin of beef,

and three pounds of mutton chops, besides two and half of bacon for breakfast, in one week?"

"Good gracious, no, Mr. Farrel. Why, that is enough to feed twenty, at least," said Esther, considerably startled at this extensive bill of fare.

"Ah, I must have been robbed, then. Isn't it dreadful how some women take advantage of one?"

"But your landlady never makes out such a bill as that?" expostulated Esther.

"Well, perhaps I have not got the items quite correctly, but I know it was something like," owned Gilbert.

"But, Mr. Farrel," began the little housekeeper on his arm, "when you are living by yourself, you should not buy a leg of mutton weighing eight pounds."

"Oh, shouldn't I?" said that fox Gilbert, "should I buy a whole sheep, then, and pickle him? He'd come cheaper in the end that way, I should think."

"No, no; whoever heard of buying a whole sheep, much less pickling him? You should have a small piece, and if it lasts too long you should have it served up for breakfast, instead of bacon."

"But Mrs. Jones has three children and two maiden sisters who are always coming to tea, and a little piece wouldn't be enough for them all."

"But you don't feed the children and sisters?"

"Oh, yes I do; keep them in prime condition too: bless you, it does my heart good to see them so fat. Why it is a known fact, that there is a code of laws observed by lodging-house keepers, for the purpose of defrauding the stranger within their gates. Talk of the Masonic rules and secrets; why, they are not to be compared to this fraternity, who continue the practices, and keep the secret inviolate from generation to generation, with a fidelity and perseverance worthy of a better cause. In these rules, the tea caddy, and the liqueur-stand hold prominent positions, and the novice in the art is warned not to omit that important item 'extras' on any occasion. There are also drawn up particular forms for the making out of the weekly bills, and it is a proof how well they must be explained, and how easily understood, from the fact that however poor a scholar the lady may be—nay, if even she has to rely on a neighbour for the making out of her accounts, she is always thoroughly up in the subject, and has every rule at her fingers' ends."

"It is no good advising you to change your lodgings then?"

"Not in the least; wherever I may go, the laws are sure to have gone before me."

"Then you should——" but Esther stopped.

"I should, what? Come, Esther, your advice is always good, and I told you my troubles on purpose to get some instruction. It is very plain I can't go on in this way."

"Oh, very plain."

"Then I think my only way is to get married," Gilbert said, pressing the hand he held very close to him. "Esther, little woman, I can't make a long speech about it, and have worked my way round to it in but a clumsy way; but I came out to-night on purpose to ask you. We have been friends this long time, now, let us be faster friends still; will you be my wife?"

A quick flush came over Esther's face, but her hand trembled, and she looked up hurriedly with a troubled expression in her grey eyes.

"You forget, Mr. Farrel, the blot that is on our family," she said in a quick low tone.

"No, my dear, I do not; but it is no disgrace," he said.

"Yes, the neighbours think it is; they point to us as we pass down the street, and—say unkind things. We could live it down, in time, but your wife, Mr. Farrel, must have no such shame to bear: it would be an ill return for your kindness, to bring my trouble to you."

"Esther, if I had thought it a disgrace, if I had felt it could make any difference in my feelings towards you, should I have come so often since, have so mixed myself up in the matter that it has been my anxiety and my care as well as yours? I loved you, Esther, before the trouble came; but that has only endeared you to me more. Come, little woman, we have shared the trouble, have gone through it, and let us be happy now. Lift up your face, and let me hear you say you have thought of me sometimes, and that you love me."

There were happy tears in Esther's eyes when she raised them now to the strong man's face, looking at her so lovingly.

"I do love you," she said simply, "very much."

"God bless thee, my lass."

Strange to say, that after this opening, Esther did not object very much to anything Gilbert proposed as regarded her family; and after a little discussion—which was very amicable, and indeed so frequently wandered from the real point that I object to give it in detail—fell completely into his views.

CHAPTER XXI.

COMING ROUND.

"By the way, Mr. Wills, you spoke of some drawings you had by you; gems, of course—got them still?" said the master, one fine afternoon between the interludes of whistling and walking up and down his private room at the mill.

"Yes, Mr. Candy Miles, I have them still; meant to take them up to town with me to-morrow, when I go; but of course if you wish to see them, Benjamin is your man. I don't ask you to buy, please yourself: Benjamin Wills knows a fine thing when he sees it, sir," and Mr. Wills brought out two or three artistic names, more or less honoured in the profession, just to prepare the master for what he was about to see.

The master whistled a little more, took another turn, and then studied the sky out of the window. He was learned on the subject of the weather, and at the present moment, seeing none but white flecked

clouds against the bright blue sky, and there being a general sunshine over everything, and an equally impartial distribution of dust, he considered it was fine, and that he should not much imperil his reputation for foresight, by pronouncing that it would possibly continue to be fine all that day at least.

"Are they up at your place?" he said, turning upon Wills.

"Unfortunately, yes. But I can send for them, a messenger in a cab — instant flight — quick delivery;" and Mr. Wills waved his arm and voluminous sleeve, and described half a circle, to indicate, though perhaps a little indefinitely, the speed at which some Pegasus of a cab horse would fly to obey the master's behest.

"No, never mind; we'll see—we'll see. Oh, I say, Wills," he broke out abruptly, as though suddenly struck by a passing idea, "does Miss Hall still teach your children?"

"Yes."

"Teach 'em well?"

"Yes, I believe so. My wife speaks very highly of her; but whether or no, I consider it a matter of conscience to allow her to continue her lessons. The poor girl is so resolved on being independent

that the deprivation of my engagement might be a serious loss to her, so whatever happens——”

“ Hallo, Wills ! ” sang out the master, turning round on his heel, “ don’t do that any more ! ”

“ What ? ” said Mr. Wills, considerably startled.

The master put out his hand in Mr. Wills’s affluent manner, imitated his step and gait, and strutted up the room. He was an admirable mimic, and his sense of anything ridiculous so exquisitely keen, that he seized upon a weak point immediately, and could caricature it with merciless fidelity.

“ No ; come, master, that is too bad.”

“ Ah, is it ? ” said the master, resuming his own honest, simple manner, that seemed more than usually simple and pleasantly quaint after the recent exaggeration. “ How much do you pay Miss Hall ? ”

Perhaps, like many other questions he put, the master had no right to proffer this one ; but a liability to such questions was a penalty his acquaintance paid for his companionship, and no one more so than Mr. Wills.

That gentleman, fully conscious of this, evaded the question a little, and then named the sum. It was small, of course, very, very small ; small, even as compared with such payments generally, and such as on hearing it made the master whistle very

vigorously ; he even began a new tune, and went at it with a spirit quite invigorating to hear.

Mr. Wills was by no means delicate of hearing, as a rule, but on the present occasion he objected very much to the master's whistling. For Mr. Candy Miles was expressive during that performance, as he was in everything ; he was a good whistler, his ear was perfect, and it was pleasant to hear, of course ; but he had at command a variety of tones and keys, each varying in expression and meaning. He could whistle contempt, till you felt your ears burn ; he could whistle ridicule, and make you feel it too ; and speculation, or indignation—almost anything ; and whatever feeling may have actuated him on the present occasion, it is certain he did not spare Mr. Wills at all.

"I like you, Mr. Wills," he said, at last : "you are so good, so charitable, and so modest ; you never gave a beggar a penny, and told him to stand at the next crossing, and proclaim your generosity to all the passers-by."

"No, Mr. Candy Miles, I never did," said Mr. Wills, very innocently.

"But you do it yourself, Benjamin, instead ; you know you do. If I have heard once, I have heard fifty times, that you engaged Miss Hall to

teach your children, and behold to what a miserable sum your charity dwindleth. You engage her because you get more work out of the poor lass at a smaller price than you could anybody else. There's your penny and your crossing. Oh, Benjamin ! Benjamin ! ”

At this point of the discussion, an hitherto forgotten duty flashed across Mr. Wills' mind. We have seen once before, in the course of this short narrative, how Mr. Wills so far did violence to his own feelings as to report a little incident that happened to cross his path ; and again a second time, even in this small space, this noble martyr to duty felt himself urged on a second time to the painful task. His innate manliness, of course, recoiled from the office thus thrust upon him ; his noble nature made him hesitate, pause, and think if it were really necessary ; if he must, indeed, a second time—but no ; stern necessity said forward : no shrinking, no cowardice ; the more thankless the task, the more repugnant the office, the more glorious the fulfilment. Besides,—though of course this was but a secondary consideration—from the unpleasant turn the conversation had at present taken, any subject that would change it was welcome. So in dashed Mr. Wills.

"Mr. Candy Miles, I think it is only fair that you should know that your son, in whom you place so much confidence and trust, has of late been acting very differently from what you suppose."

"How do you know?"

Mr. Wills thought he really never should get used to the master's ways, he was so very abrupt.

"Well, I've thought so."

"If you mean he has been in your company of late, and so is likely to come to harm, that's no news. But Frank is old enough to take care of himself."

"There are others he comes to see; my acquaintance is but a pretence," Mr. Wills said; "he is making up to Miss Hall again."

"Indeed!"

"I thought it right you should know, as her position being so altered——"

"Why the deuce—if it was so particular—why didn't you tell me before?"

Really Mr. Wills did not know; his natural scruples in betraying the lad to his father.

"Oh, Benjamin! how foolish thee be," sang out the master. "Not only false alike to friend and enemy, but to theeself also. Thee takes in my boy. Thee speaks softly to him; thee pilfers him of what

he has, and then when he will bring no more, you are not content with turning him out penniless, but you must proclaim his folly to all the world, and bring tales of him to me."

"I pilfer him! Really, Mr. Candy Miles, you——"

"From whence came those two or three charming bits that have of late been added to his very miscellaneous collection of the fine arts, within these last three or four months, if not from you? Frank does not often buy pictures."

"He certainly did buy two or three sketches from me, that were lying about. I forget what they were; but they were very insignificant. But of course the prices were fair; indeed, in consideration of his relationship to you——"

"You made him pay double what they were worth," put in Mr. Candy Miles. "You knew the lad wanted to come there; he couldn't come without some excuse, so he buys a few scraps from you. He does not care what he has, so that it insures him a right to come, and you take him in, take advantage of his indifference, and sell him, Benjamin —such rubbish. But never mind; the lad had his fancy, and must pay for it one way or another; and now that it is over, he will come no more. Only you should not turn on him when there is nothing

more to be made of him ; it isn't generous—it isn't just ! ”

“ You knew, then, that he was following Miss Hall ? That he came to my house to see her almost daily ? ”

“ Mr. Wills,” said the master, “ let us have a cab, and go up and see your drawings.”

“ But, Mr. Candy Miles——”

“ Shall we go at once ? ”

There was no mistaking the master. He would discuss the subject no more ; indeed, he was already assuming his hat and coat, and Mr. Wills was fain to do the same.

During the ride, Mr. Miles made no comment on the past subject of discussion ; he talked of the drawings he was going to see ; drew out Mr. Wills on the subject of their merits, and so insured an animated conversation, entirely foreign to the subject he appeared to wish to avoid.

When the cab stopped at No. 4, Montpellier Terrace, Mrs. Wills, becoming aware of the fact of their arrival from the bedroom window, was suddenly stricken with a very positive conviction that her beloved Benjamin had gone suddenly mad. The idea of bringing Mr. Candy Miles there without a moment's notice ! What would he think ? And the girl was baking, and sure to answer the door

with her hands covered with dough. Mrs. Wills went hot all over to think of it; and I do not envy Benjamin the curtain lecture in store for him that night.

However they had come, and the best must be made of it. Mrs. Wills, listening at the head of the stairs, heard the door opened, and the visitor shown into the front room, and a moment later Mr. Wills came bounding upstairs in a very quick undignified manner, for so stately a man.

"Here, Priscilla, get some wine. Why the devil need that little slut be always baking! We must really have a boy."

"How could you bring him, without giving me notice? It is always the case, at the most inconvenient times," retorted Mrs. Wills.

"I didn't bring him; hush! by Jove, these houses are so confounded small, that one can hear every word. I wanted to send for the things, but he wouldn't let me, and he's in an awful temper——"

My kindly reader may wonder that so simple an event as a rich man's visit should cause so much commotion. Mr. Candy Miles knew he was visiting a comparatively poor man, and could not reasonably expect the same appointments and style that he was used to at home. But there are some people who

always keep up an appearance which they have not money enough to justify; who flare up into splendour when any one is there, and live in squalid untidiness all the rest of the year. Such people, too, are constantly boasting of their homes, their perfect arrangements, their connubial bliss; so that if you drop in on them unexpectedly, and find them (as you are pretty sure to do) with the servant out, and no one to answer the door (the magnificent gentleman in Berlin gloves who waited when you were *invited*, has returned to the superintendence of his cabbages at the end of the street), with the rooms unfit to enter, and being cleaned; if you tumble on your way upstairs over dirty plates, or come suddenly upon the master and mistress having a *tête-à-tête* too animated to be strictly amicable; then, O reader, however retentive thy memory, however slight thy faith in human protestations, will not thy thoughts fly back to the paradise thy host painted, and say, "Lo, a contrast!" Whereas, had he never boasted, you would never have expected; had he never exaggerated, you would not have been disappointed; and, last but not least, had he never given his general magnificent invitations, abstaining though, by-the-by, from special ones, you would never have come.

Not that it mattered to Mr. Candy Miles. The untidy servant, the fireless room, the colloquy on the stairs, all noticed and heard by that keen regarde of human foibles and human follies, had only the effect of bringing a smile to his face, and the queerest little twinkle to his grey eyes. He had come for a certain purpose, which, perhaps, was in no way connected with drawings, or indeed with the fine arts in any shape; and these little things, causing so much dismay in the hospitable bosom of Mrs. Wills, were not matters of vital importance to the honoured guest himself. Catching the sound of a piano in the adjoining room, he stopped, for he had commenced his usual promenade, even in that limited space, and listened. So this was where Frank had come day after day, where he had allowed himself to be victimized and cheated, and made blind with his eyes quite open all the time, and his vision quite clear? And now he came no more—would come no more, was disappointed and unhappy.

I think my reader will agree that though Mr. Candy Miles was an eccentric, and at times a very masterful and overbearing old man, that he was by no means an unkindly one. He loved to whip affectation, to tear the mask from what hid meanness

and littleness behind it; he seemed to exact extreme obedience, yet he mistrusted fawning and flattery, and adulation, and had a wholesome admiration for people who dared to hold their own and respect themselves in spite of him. His son had shown open rebellion; he had said, "I will not obey you, but if I disobey you, I will tell you first;" and behold his father was not a whit less fond of the lad for saying it. He might jeer at it, but could not help respecting his fidelity to his old love; his very scorn of the old man's threat did not move his anger very much; and Margaret, was it fair to her? She had been brave, she had borne ill-fortune with a constancy and spirit that the master had watched and thought over when none knew. It was a hard position for the lass; should he not go and see her? He would learn how matters really stood; so he let himself into the little passage, and thence to the room where he could hear the piano.

Miss Hall was there, standing over Charlotte Ann, and beating time with her hand. The master shut the door, and Margaret turning, knew him instantly.

"How do you do, my dear?" said he, taking her hand and looking at her quite kindly. "How's your mother? Is she better? I am sorry to hear she has been so ill."

"She is better now, thank you, almost well again."

The master peered into the girl's face till he brought the colour there, and stood a little undecided, patting the hand he still held in both of his. He brought a touch of his usual abruptness to bear him through.

"My lad has told me that you teach at several places besides here; do you like it?"

"No, Mr. Miles. But it is the only means I have of earning a little money."

"But your mother's brother, I thought he looked after things for you; surely there must have been something?"

"My mother receives fifty pounds a year, but that is not sufficient without some help from me."

"Dear me, dear me," the master said, simply. "And what about Frank—he has been here a good deal lately—"

"Do not be afraid, Mr. Candy Miles," Margaret said, quickly; "Mr. Francis will not come any more now."

"Won't he? Can't we love him any more then, Margaret? He is a good lad; though he is obstinate when he takes a fancy into his head."

Margaret was puzzled. How was this? Mr. Miles

speaking quietly and kindly of his son ! Had she misunderstood Frank ?

" I think it would not be very true love I could show to him, to deprive him of your confidence, sir."

" Unless he valued the love more than the confidence, which he seems to do."

" Mr. Francis is not ill ?" Margaret said with new alarm.

" No, he's not ill; he's not well, though: restless and unhappy. He's a queer young chap, is Frank," said the master. " There's Wills looking for me. So we've cast the boy off, have we ?"

" Yes." It was not a very positive assent, though.

" And we won't see him any more, eh ? "

" I do not think that it is likely."

" Ah, better not, better not ; he'll get over it."

" So I told him, sir ; and he was angry with me for saying it."

" Ah, young chaps like to think they are pining away and getting thin, when they can't have what they want ; but they get over it in time."

" Yes, and learn to forget very soon ; Mr. Francis will doubtless prove an apt pupil," Margaret said sadly, and with a quivering lip. " But you, who put the barrier between us, should not tell me this. I give your boy up to you : I let him think of me

unjustly, so that he may not displease you ; but do not in return try to make him forget me. It is a hard life I have marked out for myself."

" She does love him," thought the master ; but he said, " Let me help to make it lighter, Margaret. I was your father's oldest friend, I must come and see you."

" No, no, I want no help. It was not that I meant."

The master hearing Mr. Wills becoming distracted outside in his vain search for his missing visitor, pressed Margaret's hand, repeated his determination to see her again, and speedily ; stuck his hands in his pockets, and came out suddenly upon Mr. Wills, having his head a good deal on one side, a puzzled expression on his face, and whistling, " Still so gently," with very marked emphasis.

CHAPTER XXII.

MISTAKEN NOTIONS.

MISS SARAH MILES had laid aside her embroidery frame! Any one acquainted with this lady must have felt such an act predicted at least a revolution; yet it was true. It was put aside with no untidy haste, the wools were carefully covered, a sheet of cambric paper effectually veiled the glories of the masterpiece itself, and the whole was stowed in a cupboard where neither dust, nor rot, nor treacherous sunshine could obtrude, and mar the hidden splendours.

Had some other passion, more absorbing even than working “Joseph sold by his brothers,” in coloured wools, taken possession of her soul, and rendered her indifferent to her old fancy? It was only another proof of the inconstancy of woman.

Miss Miles had also taken to elaborate dressing, and to smiling occasionally (quite a new accomplishment), and to saying pleasant things, and, indeed, making herself as agreeable as possible; so that it was a change for the better, and all the household

revelled in the reprieve from cold looks and hard reprimands. Even Frank noticed it, and old Candy Miles wondered "what foolery was up now," as he expressed it. Miss Eliza saw it too, but uneasily; perhaps, she, of all the household, guessed the cause; and the little lady found much therein to occasion her disquiet. She was so far different from her sister, that she was warm-hearted and affectionate and unwilling to give pain; and though Sarah was somewhat of a tyrant to her behind the scenes, yet it was not in her nature to wish her ill; nay, on thinking it probable she might be the cause of unhappiness to her, grieved over it, though she saw no means of averting it.

One evening when Mr. Francis was walking in the meadow, in the gentle light just before the day draws in, smoking his pipe and turning over anything but agreeable thoughts, Eliza joined him.

"Frank, is it true that you are going away again?" she asked, putting her arm through his.

"Yes, Lizzy. Why not?"

"You are so often away, we never have you at home now."

"I get tired of one place. I am hardly used to be tied down. Besides, I am going on business now, not pleasure."

"Yet it must be lonely going from one place to another, and always alone."

"It is a little, sometimes, Eliza."

"Then why go?"

"I hardly know. I am restless of daily routine; it is so objectless. My companions pall upon me; their objects in life are nothing to me; I scarcely seem to be one of them."

"I think you are not happy, Frank," Eliza said, looking up timidly into his face.

"Perhaps, not; but then who is? It seems to me, my little sister, that we must be content with a very medium state of happiness, must take things as they come, and not expect to be very happy, nor allow oneself to be quite cast down if things don't go exactly as they should."

"I think some of us are happy, sometimes," his sister said with a smile and a little blush; "and I think it is wrong not to be happy when it lies in our power; as it would be wrong not to enjoy God's sunshine, and be thankful that it makes us merrier and lighter of heart."

"Have you found the secret of continual happiness, then? It would be a greater find, to my thinking, than the philosopher's stone."

"I wanted to tell you, Frank —"

Frank laughed outright. "Is Mr. Charlton your secret?" said that sagacious gentleman; "why, I was only just now making up my mind to kick him and his infernal guitar out of the house."

"Oh, Frank, and he plays so beautifully! Wait a bit, sir, and you shall turn me out too."

"What! has it come to that? Why, I daresay you've settled the number of flounces on your wedding gown, if the truth were known. But I won't give my consent."

"Do without it, sir! But you won't be so unkind. Augustus spoke to my father about it to-day."

"You have been very sly, haven't you? Just as if I did know all about it long ago. But is not there some mistake? I thought he came looking after Sarah—there, don't be jealous, but he really was very attentive in that quarter."

"I—I have been afraid some one else thinks so too, Frank. I don't know of course, but I have thought so—sometimes, at least; she has changed so of late. But it is not Augustus's fault in the least; he was obliged to be civil of course, and Sarah is a little apt to misconstrue commonplace attentions into something more particular."

"Mr. Charlton should have made more difference in his behaviour between you," Frank said, very

severely. "If such a mistake has taken place, he is most clearly in fault. But you have told her of your engagement before this, of course ? "

"No, I dare not. Don't be angry with me, Frank ; but Augustus did not want it mentioned for a little time. I did try to hint to her in the most delicate manner that his attentions might mean nothing, at least not what she thought, and she grew so angry in an instant, that she would not speak to me for a day after, and I have not tried it since."

"She must be told at once," Frank said, gravely ; "and I must look into the matter a little. But what does my father say ? Have you heard from Mr. Charlton since ? "

"He sent me a hurried note after the interview, to say it was all right, and that my father did not offer any very great objection ; but I fancy he did not speak to Augustus very kindly. Augustus was quite flurried about speaking to him at all ; he is so nervous, and my father is so very abrupt and strange at times ; I am afraid it was hardly a pleasant interview."

Frank thought he should like to have been there at the time, to have seen the curt, keen, merciless, little cotton spinner, drive into the effeminate dandy, whose usual invincible weapons of white hands and

had had an opportunity of speaking to Miss Miles as he had intended, there spread a rumour through the household; nobody told anybody about it, of course, but everybody had an inkling that something was going "to happen," and most of them a very strong suspicion as to what that something was.

Miss Miles knew nothing of it overnight, for she slept well, and waked in the morning in no greater dilemma than an indecision as to which of her new light dresses she should wear at the flower-show, to which Mr. Charlton had made an engagement to take them that morning.

It is well known that ladies' maids never talk while assisting at their mistresses' toilet, or that if they do their conversation runs of necessity on—the last "Corn Bill," let us say, or Sir Robert's last speech, and never on the love affairs of the ladies' friends, and still less—O horror! on the admiration the faithful Abigail may have noticed the lady herself has excited in the bosom of some one of the opposite sex. So we must fancy, that, as the rumour certainly did reach Miss Miles during dressing, and not before, that it was borne on the sunbeams that poured without asking leave, into the privacy of her chamber; or that the morning breeze, coming all fresh and fragrant, whispered it in her ear as she sat dressing her

hair. Let it have come, however, how it may, the effect it produced was instantaneous. Miss Miles was not given to fainting, or, indeed, to strong emotions of any description as a rule; but now the brush fell from her hand, and she leant back in her chair, dropping her hands heavily upon her lap. The unconscious Abigail, standing behind, saw the face of her mistress reflected in the glass before her, very white, and the lips, bereft of all colour, pressed together, almost convulsively.

The maid having come from a very high family, was, perhaps, more used to little ebullitions of emotion than a commoner might suppose, and applied the usual restoratives with such readiness that Miss Miles recovered herself almost immediately.

“That will do, thank you. Close the window; the flowers smell so faint they overcome me. Now—finish dressing me,” she said, and went through the closing phases of her toilet without any more remark, but with the same colourless, ghastly face.

“Mr. Miles is not gone out yet, is he?” she asked of Rascals, whom she met going towards the master’s room, when she descended into the hall.

“No, ma’am.”

Miss Miles put her handkerchief to her lips, and crossed over to her father’s room. That gentleman

still retained his old habit of early rising, and had already breakfasted.

"Can I speak with you a few minutes, father?" Miss Miles said, coming in very tall and stately.

"Yes. Go, Rascals. Well, Sally, what is it?"

"Mr. Charlton has been here very often of late —very often, indeed. Has he given you any satisfactory reason for his visits?"

The master looked up at her from beneath his white eyebrows rather puzzled; but replied jauntily,

"Yes, Sally, thank you; I am quite satisfied."

His light tone stung her, and she leant back against the mantel-shelf very faint. This was the first bit of ridicule that foreboded what was to follow. Oh! she would be revenged!

"Am I to understand then, sir, that he comes in the light of my sister's lover?"

"Well, I suppose so."

"And you allow it!" she broke out, quivering with anger. "You countenance this vile proceeding. You can overlook the miserable course of deception that has been carried on under your own roof, sir, and while enjoying your hospitality?"

"Come, Sally, don't get into a passion, my lass," said Mr. Candy Miles. "I don't know about deceit; it is the usual thing, I suppose, for a lad to come

hanging about the lass he takes a fancy to. He can't say what he means before he has got over the door-mat, and has seen something of the girl. And if I had objected to him from the beginning, why, I had the option of kicking him out before he got too intimate."

"He has spoken to you, then, sir, about it?"

"Yes; he came to the mill yesterday. Liz ought to have told you, too, before this. But young or old, lad or lass, you are all the same. If you are ever so open before, as sure as ever you get a sweetheart, you'll lie to your own father, and get as deep in a few days as years wouldn't have made you without. You are all alike—all alike," and the master took a little whistling, and a little exercise, apparently on the strength of his theory.

"And you can overlook this long and studied course of misrepresentation and deceit?" cried Miss Miles, scarcely able to stand. "You can take his false hand, can trust him, after what has passed!"

Her sharp keen tones, wrung from her in her great pain and anger, struck the master with a new force, and he turned round upon her quickly with perhaps, for the first time, a suspicion as to how things stood.

"*I have not been deceived. If others have, it is*

their own look-out ; most likely their own mistake," he said, sternly. "The lad has acted fairly towards me."

"And it is because he is rich ; because he will be a desirable son-in-law, that he can be pardoned."

"Miss Miles, this is no question of pardon, or deceit ; that must lie within yourself."

He laid his hand upon her arm, looking at her darkly. She met his eyes, and then dropped into a chair, with a low cry.

"You are not well this morning ; you will take it easier presently. I will send your maid," he said, and went out, leaving her there. On the threshold he met Eliza coming to find her sister, and he stopped her. "Your sister is not very well," he said. "No, don't go to her, she is only nervous. I don't think this air agrees with her ; she must have a change of scene. Call her maid, and send her to her ; and you go and give Frank his breakfast ; he has been waiting this half-hour."

He stopped to see his orders carried out, and his daughter taken upstairs, and then went off to the mill.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PEACEMAKER.

VERY little more than a month after, Esther and Gilbert Farrel went off one bright morning, and got married very quietly at a little out-of-the-way church, that nobody knew anything about, but which certainly served to tie the indissoluble knot as firmly as would have been done at St. George's, Hanover Square. Poor Mrs. Rueby was balked in her desire of a smart wedding on the occasion of her daughter's very successful marriage ; but the obstinate little bride would have her way in this, and though she could not object to the neighbourly spread provided on the occasion, she would not allow any of the demonstration Gilbert would willingly have made to humour his mother-in-law ; and, in fact, she showed herself as saucily self-willed in her white wedding gown as she had been in her sober brown one.

They were going off for a week to the Cumberland lakes, and Esther, having changed her dress, bid

her parents good-by with a kiss, and even a tear for Mary who clung to her; and went off on her husband's arm to the station.

"Esther, we are two hours too soon," said Gilbert, when they had gone some way; "but I came now, because I have an errand I wanted you to do. You won't mind it, dear, even though it is on your wedding-day?"

Truly a queer day to go errands! But no; Esther would not mind even then.

"You know Miss Margaret Hall?"

"Yes, Gilbert."

"She is very unhappy. The thought of her and Mr. Francis comes more heavy like on me, my darling, now we are so happy, and she is alone and wretched."

"She wretched! Oh, Gilbert! what can I do for her?" Esther said.

"That's my own dear little wife! always ready to make others happy!" Gilbert said, with very sincere admiration. "Why, you see, she and Mr. Francis were engaged before her father died, and he had that fever, and went away with Mary. He wants to marry her now, for he always loved her, Esther, I am sure; but it is a hard thing she has got to forgive; and as I don't suppose she has heard a good account of the matter, I thought you

wouldn't perhaps mind going up now and telling her how it really stands, and that Mary is well and happy. I know she loves him."

It was a very queer notion, certainly ; but, perhaps, it bore the stamp of Gilbert's real character better than anything else could have done. A straightforward, honest desire to do good ; a clumsy way of doing it, may be, but with a good intent of saying for his young master what Frank could not say for himself.

"Oh, Gilbert, I could not ; I tried very hard to speak of it when I was nursing her mother, but she was always very distant with me, just because I was Mary's sister."

"Why, I don't mean, that you should go up on purpose, my dear ; but just to tell her you've been married—oh, that isn't usual, is it ? Well, don't laugh, but you might drop in a word for Mr. Frank. He seems determined to go off without seeing her again, and then it will be all up with them ; and a word or two from you, just because you are Mary's sister, might do wonders in bringing them together again."

Perhaps Gilbert was not so very far wrong after all ; and, though Esther might be still very doubtful as to the use of her mission, she made no further demur, and leaving Gilbert at the corner of the street,

went to Mrs. Hall's with anything but a confident heart.

Margaret was at home, and received the quiet little bride with the greatest cordiality, and a cheerfulness that became her well. She said she had heard all about it long since, though Esther had not thought fit to tell her, and had half a mind to have come and seen her married.

Esther was flustered and agitated; the elder of the two, she was not quite at her ease still with the tall graceful girl, now looking so grave and almost sad, in her black dress and little collar, lending herself, with kindly interest, to what Esther might have to say, and forgetful of herself and her own griefs in her wish to set her visitor at ease. But Esther got round to her subject by degrees; she told Margaret of the new plans made for her family, and how they were going away; then she brought in Mary; and then, gaining confidence, she spoke of old times, so simply and gently, that Margaret, however ready to take alarm, could not do so now, but was fain to listen. Esther, speaking of Frank, showed how little there was really to remember against him, and with a blush on her cheek, but looking at Margaret with her clear, truthful eyes, said she "hoped he would be happy, he deserved it—indeed he did."

Margaret listened at first very eagerly, then, with her face half turned aside, very sadly. She was grateful for the praise, she had forgiven him, but it was very sweet to hear those most interested in it—to hear *her* sister speak kindly of him too. But it was nothing to Margaret; whatever she might feel, it could make no difference now; and she turned to Esther and took her hands, looking into her face with grave, sad eyes.

"Thank you, very much, for what you have told me," she said; "it was an effort, I know, for you to speak of him after what has passed, and you made the effort for me who owe you so much already. But it is all past now."

"All?"

"Yes," Margaret said, with a quiet smile; "I shall live with my mother and sister now, and never, perhaps, be anything but a music teacher, till I am an old maid, and grown grey. I shall not let you forget me, though," she added, gaily, "and shall come and see you continually, when you are settled." And she drew a little ring she wore on her finger and put it on Esther's, and kissed her when she went away, and bade her be very happy, and was altogether very merry and light-hearted. But when she had watched Esther down the street and seen her rejoin her hus-

band, why, she came in and went upstairs to her own room and looking-glass. "Till I'm grown grey," she said, repeating her own words, "how long will it be till then? And will life seem always as dreary till then as it does now?" And the reflected face grew very, very sad, and the big tears fell, and then it was hidden by two hands suddenly clasped before it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OLD TIMES AGAIN.

Mrs. Hall and Juliet having gone out to tea, Margaret, on that particular afternoon, was left alone. There was a great temptation to put aside work and reading, and, having a little leisure and peace, to fall into that seductive state of half meditation, half dreaming, that it was Margaret's constant struggle to avoid, and which then beset her with unusual force.

But no: out came the sewing, the needles and thread; the place was taken resolutely at the window, and the wandering recollections dragged into usefulness, and required to bring forward the amount of the baker's bill, and imagination allowed to float no farther than required by a surmise on Margaret's part as to when Mrs. Grey would pay her quarter's teaching, and so enable her to meet the demand.

A ring at the door. Enter Betty a few seconds after. "Please, Miss Margaret, a gentleman wants to see you," and Betty's eyes twinkle, for she thinks it must be some one looking "arter the young missus."

"For me? Did he send in his card?"

"No, miss, he didn't."

Margaret put by her work, ascertained by the little glass hanging up, that hair and collar were neat and straight, and proceeded to the front room.

But with her hand on the door, and before she had seen him, there came a conviction upon Margaret as to who he was, and why he came; and a cowardly desire to go away to hide herself from him, as from a powerful temptation, possessed her; but she put it back, and went in.

He was standing at the window with his hat in his hand; it was plain he was going away directly, he would say a few words and then leave her, Margaret thought. After what had gone by, he would never speak tenderly to her again; a few words of common civility would pass between them and then it would be all over, and he would go away and forget her.

He looked up quietly when she came in: his face was pale and worn; the dull afternoon light was upon it from the window, and showed the deep lines that destroyed its former boyish appearance.

"I have come to wish you good-by, Miss Hall; I am going away," he said, and held out his hand.

He was going, then. Margaret faltered out something, but made no offer to take the proffered hand.

"May we not part friends?" he said. "I am going a long way: many years may elapse before I return; and time will then so have altered us, that you need not be ashamed, Miss Hall, of granting me that one right—of parting as friends."

He was looking at her very quietly, and there was no emotion in his voice. He had received his sentence, then, and taken it as irremediable: perhaps had even lost the wish to alter it.

"We *do* part as friends. Why not?" Margaret said. "But why are you going? Why are you leaving your father and your home? I thought you—you were settled in business; for some time, at least."

"Did you? No; I was always restless, always impatient of restraint and routine, and I do not care about business, now I have no object to tie me to it; and I want to be off."

"And are you going far?"

"To America. Does it seem far?" he said, with a faint smile.

Margaret turned away. She did not care that he should see the tears that were gathering in her eyes. A deep sense of loneliness had come upon her; a craving for the love she had spurned so recklessly, and that now would never be offered again. Oh,

God! the road was so lonely, the stones so sharp,
the burden so heavy!

"It is no new fancy," Mr. Francis went on, without taking any heed of her emotion, if, indeed, he noticed it. "When I first went abroad a year ago, I had thought of extending it that far. My father has some business transactions that want looking into; but I had other hopes and plans that brought me back home. And now that they have failed," he added, "I go back to my original plan. So I will say good-by to you with what grace I may, and go my way."

If he felt deeply, he certainly did not show it; nay, was speaking carelessly, and came and offered his hand to her a second time, with quite an indifferent air.

Margaret gave him hers, scarce aware of the action; but after he had taken it, and had turned to the door, she started up.

"Frank! say you forgive me. Don't let me think you——"

He turned as she hesitated, with his hand still on the latch.

"Margaret, there is no question of forgiveness between us. I have offered you my love, and you have refused it; have shown me how lightly women

feign love or indifference; how little they care for anything beyond their own notion of dignity!"

He hurled the words at her, as it were; he threw aside the cloak of indifference he had so carefully assumed, and showed a glow of indignation, anger, and, thank God! warm, passionate, enduring love, beneath. "Do you think I respect you for refusing me? That I put your memory on a pedestal to fall down and worship, as something higher than human passions and human love? Margaret, I do not. I pity the poor little meanness that cannot forgive what has been fully explained. I see in it an absurd pride, which merits no respect, and I give it none!"

"Hush! hush! You must not talk so!"

"Why not?" said Frank, with bitter emphasis. "I shall be gone soon; and you can forget me and my love. I tell you again that you have failed to bear out my estimate of your character. I had thought of you, Margaret, as something very noble and generous. I have thought of you—and ah! how it has comforted me when I was away from you!—as having a nature too grandly formed for the little pettiness of ordinary women; even when I left you, I looked back and trusted you, thinking, 'when Margaret knows all, she will forgive me.' But I have been wrong; and if you cannot

overlook that one fault, if you cannot bear it should be said of you, ‘Margaret was slighted once, and has forgiven it !’ why it is better, as you said, and we will part.”

“Oh, it was not that,” Margaret said; “don’t speak of it again. I have forgotten that long since.”

“It was that you never cared for me, then, Margaret? Tell me so at once; nay, I know it now.”

Something irresistibly impelled Margaret to speak, to justify herself. Past scruples, past resolves, were forgotten; she only knew that he thought of her wrongly, accused her unjustly.

“If I do not care for you, why do I make this sacrifice? I see it is better that you should go; that it is necessary to retain your rightful position as your father’s heir. And I tell you to go and leave me, and keep that position; and yet you think me mean and ungenerous.”

A sudden thrill possessed Frank, and he came forward, with quick, eager looks.

“Margaret, would you rather I stayed, then?”

“If—if it is better than wealth,” she faltered.

“And you love me? Ah! you must tell me so.”

“Can’t you believe it without?” and she laid her head upon his shoulder.

“But if it is so—I can scarcely credit it—if I

have got my darling back again, and she loves me? Why have you caused me all this pain, when one little word would have assuaged it?"

"Do you think it was no pain to me either?"

"But why have sent me away at all, with those bitter, mocking words ringing in my ears? My God! I was so wretched then. I think I was half mad."

"And yet I loved you."

"And you knew I should come back. You reserved the balm for me; you intended to tell me—"

"No, no," Margaret said; "only it was hard not to have one's sacrifice appreciated, and to see you going away thinking so wrongly of me."

"But I might not have come at all. Would you have let me go away with my mistaken impressions?"

"Yes, I was determined to do so; even when your father spoke to me of you the other day so kindly, that I loved him for it, I was resolved to persevere in what I was persuaded would be for your benefit."

"My father speak to you, Margaret?"

"Yes. I do not think, after all, he will be very hard on his disobedient boy."

"God bless him!" Frank cried. "Dear old father."

After all," Mr. Francis said presently, and with a very sagacious air, "I think, Margaret, that you have been trying very hard not to care anything about me."

"At least if I own my failure, you should be more generous than to taunt me with it."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A STERN PARENT.

“FATHER,” said Mr. Francis, coming the following morning into that gentleman’s room, and speaking with his accustomed bluntness, savoured now perhaps with a defiant consciousness of wrong-doing, “I am going to be married !”

Mr. Candy Miles looked up from his paper, and regarded his son for some seconds after this declaration very steadfastly ; then he asked,—

“And to Margaret Hall ?”

“Yes.”

“Frank, thee art a softer chap than I thought thee, after all. Why couldn’t you be satisfied when the girl said no, and not go asking if she really meant it ?”

Frank coloured and his father laughed.

“Eh, you fool,” said he, looking at him queerly.

Frank had made his announcement with considerable fear ; he had anticipated threats, anger, violence ;

it was a relief, of course, to find his father take it so quietly ; but he did not half like the intense contempt with which his father seemed to regard him.

"Fool or not, father, if a man sets his mind upon a thing, be it a wife, or be it money, he can't be far wrong in trying to get it," he retorted with spirit, "or being elated where he does get it."

"Or crying if he don't," sneered the master. "We've had some sour looks about the house lately, and I thought you were trying to get thin, but couldn't manage it."

Frank rapped his foot irritably on the floor, and bit his lip ; he was determined not to grow angry. "I have been very unhappy, father," he replied.

"And we went to our love, and we said, 'We are going away ; it is madness to remain in your vicinity.' Did you get up well for the occasion, Frank ? 'Only I thought I'd just come and tell you, so that you can repent in time, if you've a mind,' and——"

"Hang it, father, don't be so hard on me."

"And the lady came round, Frank, at once, didn't she ? It's an old dodge, my lad, and has succeeded time out of mind before. Say to a woman, 'I'm going, I'm going,' and I'd bet my head she says, 'You shan't.' Only we do it more politely, I suppose, and get to kissing and calling pretty names first ; and

then miss finds out that perhaps you may as well stay, and the ship goes and leaves Jack on the shore."

"Margaret acted a noble part, and you must not laugh at her, father," Frank said.

"It's not at her I'm laughing; it's you, my lad. Thee art a rare soft chap, as ever I saw in all my life."

"I think not, father," said the son, critically.

"Well, wait a bit. Maggie's got a temper, and you want some to keep you down; you never know your own mind two minutes together: now you're off—now you are staying—now you are miserable—now you are happy; so you'll be none the worse for having some one to tell you what you must do, and seeing you do it."

"Then you think it will prove beneficial to me?" said Frank, trying to lay hold of some point in all this banter.

"Like hanging, I believe it's very beneficial to the system, if you can stand it," replied the incorrigible old gentleman.

"And you have no objection to it?" Frank put in, eagerly; "you do not oppose my choice?"

"My dear lad, if I wanted you to go one way, I should pull you another, and so get you round the right corner at last."

" You will receive Margaret as your daughter? You will acknowledge her —"

" No, no!" screamed the master in his shrillest tones, " I never said that!"

" But you mean it, father; you will throw no further obstacle in my path? Do not force me to disobey you, by laying on me commands it is out of my power to obey; for now I am as surely tied as though I had been married, and nothing can alter it. Why may we not be all happy together? You had used to like Margaret."

The master, up and down his room, fell into a step to the tune he was whistling, and went blithely backwards and forwards. Certainly, considering the awful intelligence he had just received, he was very merry.

" You remember, Frank," said he, presently, " what I told you a month or two back, would be the consequences of your perseverance in this matter."

" Yes, father; and I have not forgotten it."

" You must know me well enough to know that what I say I never change," Mr. Candy Miles said sternly; " you have disobeyed me, and must take the consequences."

" I don't ask you to change that; I dare say I can get enough to live on. It is not that I want——"

"What is it, then?" the master stopped as he put the question.

"I want your good will back to me, father; I want you to forgive me, and to take Margaret as your dear daughter," said Frank, with a tremor in his voice, and his face flushing; "to say God bless us when we are married, and wish us well. I want you to be more satisfied with what I am doing, that it may be less a reproach to me that I have so ill repaid the kindness of years."

"Hush, lad, keep to your work, and you'll be independent of me." Yet the master was touched in spite of himself, and did not look quite steadily at the earnest young man.

"I can never be independent of your affection, father," and Frank's voice was very low.

Mr. Candy Miles resumed his walking, but not his whistling; perhaps if he had, the notes would not have come out so clear and flutelike as usual just then. If there were a kindly feeling predominant then, he put it aside directly with his accustomed impatience, and began abruptly at a new point of the question.

"Have you settled what to do with Mrs. Hall, in the new arrangements?" he asked.

"My dear father, I have had no time to think

about such things; my first duty was to tell you. But I suppose, now you mention it, she will come and live with her daughter," and Frank's face fell a little; he and the lady in question had never been fond of each other, and the prospect of such close quarters was not pleasant to anticipate.

"Better not; that is always a bad beginning for a young fellow. She led poor Hall a queer life of it. Better pension her off."

"I must consult Margaret."

"That's a good boy—we have no longer an opinion of our own: it will be 'ask Maggie' to the end of the chapter, now. But she won't object, she's not so fond of her."

"She has been a good daughter, fond or not," Frank said, a little energetically.

"Ah, I dare say; better take my advice, though, and confine your intercourse with her mother to a few occasional visits," said the master, taking up his hat; "few and far between, as I suppose your affection is not expected to embrace all the family."

"No, I suppose not. But, father, before you go. You will come and see us married?"

"Hallo! you are in a hurry! When is it to be?" asked the master, stopping short.

"Don't know quite as yet; it shall not be long

first, though, I am determined. We have been engaged long enough, father, at any rate," he said, with a smile.

"Ah, I shall be out of town."

"My dear father, we will put it off till you return."

"No, you won't, Frank."

"Then it shall be before you go."

"No, it shall not."

"But, father, surely you will not carry your objection so far. It will make Margaret so unhappy."

"Very sorry, but can't help it. Can't be there if I am out of town, can I?" And the master gave Frank one of his peculiar looks, and went out into the garden, whistling.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DIFFICULTY SURMOUNTED.

Of the occurrences contained in the last two months, and so nearly affecting his personal happiness, Mr. George Iliffe was as yet in a pleasant state of ignorance; that gentleman having a day or two after the interview here recorded with Margaret, been compelled by business to take himself off to Scotland, and to remain there much longer than he had at first supposed would be necessary.

During that absence, and while chafing at the unavoidable delay, George had, however, come to a conclusion that perhaps was only natural. Before Margaret had dismissed him, and while there was yet a possibility of her not doing so, he had looked upon that probability very philosophically; said he could bear it—nay, expected it. But now that it had come, now that it would be necessary that he should leave her, or stay to watch his hated rival work his way, a torrent of passions seemed to burst

from his control ; he said fiercely he would be revenged, he could not stand by and see all he loved pass from him ; at any rate, he would see Frank, learn what he meant, how far his suit had progressed in his absence, if possible pick a quarrel with him, and dare the cotton-spinner's lad to meet him on fair ground.

On the evening he returned home ; finding Margaret was out, he resolved to hunt up Frank Miles at once. He had been restless to carry out his intention ever since he had conceived it, and now the temptation grew irresistibly strong. What had passed in his absence he did not learn. Mrs. Hall was out too, but the girl said Mr. Miles had been at the house twice, and had seen Miss Hall.

Mr. Iliffe went first to the mill, but Mr. Francis was not there ; he had gone home early, they told him. So George went on to the house. The light was fading, and on the lonely road drawing near to Madapolam House he was the only passenger. Good God ! if he could meet Frank there with none to judge between them but their own personal hatred ; with no one to interfere ; the road almost dark, and so lonely ! George Iliffe stopped short, aghast at the exultant spirit of reckless revenge that had taken possession of him. What change

had come over him to madden him so? He tried to think more calmly, he must not meet Frank thus, with thoughts of death upon him; there must be no sudden violence; he must be very quiet, and if it became necessary to insult him, to do it with quiet dignity and self-possession. He was so near the house by this time that he did not go in at once, but turned down into the lane running near, to get a few minutes' more time.

In the perfect stillness of the evening, the running brook fell noisily over the stones; such an evening and such repose should have lulled the angry spirit into peace; but George was beyond the influence of nature just then, he only knew that it was very quiet and lonely and dim of light, and that he would have given the world to have come face to face with Frank Miles, and been alone with him.

As though an avenging spirit had heard his wish, he had not reached the third stile in the lane, when by a sudden turn he found himself close upon a gentleman standing at the stile; and when he turned, why, it was Frank Miles and none else. But he was not alone; there was a lady by the stile too, she had Frank's arm when George first came up, but dropped it seeing him, and blushed very deeply.

George, on the contrary, studying the pair, grew

ghastly white; and even Frank, though certainly the least embarrassed, was not quite pleased at the meeting.

"I did not expect you back so soon, Mr. Iliffe," Margaret said. "Have you been home?"

"Yes, Miss Hall. I did not come here to find you, but Mr. Frank Miles," George said, speaking with an effort.

"Do you know Mr. Miles? Shall I introduce —"

"Thank you, Miss Hall; I do know Mr. Miles—very well."

Margaret glanced fearfully at him; his constrained manner of speaking struck her with awe. What did he mean? what had he come to see Frank for? The two rivals, now brought together for the first time, stood glaring at each other with the remembrance of what pain each had cost the other, written on their faces. Frank was by far the coolest; he had won the victory, so could afford to be more generous; yet his bearing expressed no very kindly feeling.

"Margaret, Mr. Iliffe wishes to speak to me; will you excuse me a little; I shall not go far: or shall I take you into the house, and see this gentleman there?"

"I will not detain you long," George said.

But Margaret put her hand within Frank's arm and looked steadfastly at Mr. Iliffe.

"If you have anything to say to Frank, let me hear it; I will not go away."

She resented his interference; she thought he had no right to come and talk to Frank, most likely to quarrel with him.

"It is not usual for ladies to stand by when two men have to settle such an account as have Mr. Miles and I," George said, looking at her bitterly; "I would rather you left us."

"That you may quarrel! No; I must stop and prevent it."

"You cannot, Miss Hall."

"Not you, perhaps, sir; but Frank has no quarrel with you; he shall not heed your insults."

"Since Miss Hall insists on deferring this meeting," George said, turning from her and speaking to Frank, "will you name where we may meet without fear of disturbance?"

"With pleasure, sir; there is nothing I wish so much as an opportunity to pay back the insults you have for the last six months heaped upon my head under the false pretence of protecting Miss Hall," cried Frank; "and I shall insist upon knowing

what right you had to arrogate the title you took and bore so insolently."

"I want nothing better than to explain it to you, sir," said George, doggedly.

"'Tis not I who will balk you, then; there is no time like the present. I myself should have sought this interview had not a wish of Margaret's previously restrained me; as it is, I am glad to meet you—very glad." Frank's voice shook with passion; the other stood calmly watching him, with deep, intense hatred in his looks.

"It is no fresh trait in Mr. Miles's character to find him acting the bravo in the presence of ladies," sneered George; "but since Miss Hall is here and insists on staying, she will bear witness that I have never spared you, and that any reparation you may be disposed to demand you are fully justified to insist on. Could I have prevented it, Frank Miles, you should never have spoken to her again. I did all I could to keep you from her, to spare her the humiliation of your presence, as you, it seemed, had not the manliness to do it."

"What do you want to aggravate me to do?" cried Frank; "what do you want to gain by these fresh insults, or to prove? If it is to quarrel, I think we have sufficient grounds already, on the insolent

message you sent back to me when I thought right to make an offer to Miss Hall, that I fancied at the time might be acceptable."

"And cloaked it under your father's name."

"If I did, I had my reasons; and who are you, Mr. Iliffe, to question my acts, or my way of performing them? What right had you to interfere in the matter? Surely it was not under Miss Hall's supervision; and without it, was a piece of unwarrantable interference on your part."

"I am quite aware of it, sir; it looks like it, and I offer you any reparation you like to demand," George said, wanting the challenge to come from Frank, if possible, and quietly pursuing his object of goading the young man on to give it.

"It was possibly your intent, sir, to cover your true meaning under the pretence of kindness for Miss Hall, and to earn a right to dictate to her, by being useful to her family."

"We will put that aside," George said, with an emotion he could ill suppress; "since you have succeeded, sir, you shall not point at my failure."

Frank looked at him.

"I cannot quarrel with any one who was so kind to her," he said, with his own generous feelings gaining ground. "We were striving for a 'prize

which only one could win. Since that was the necessity, why need we dispute which was the worthier? God knows I have not deserved what I have gained; but since I have won, why need we be enemies?"

George was silent, it was not this he wanted; he had desired quick words, hard quarrelling, a speedy issue and a violent one; but this disarmed him. Those words of Frank's, that he could not distort into fear of him, but to generous pity, wrought a change upon him that he rebelled against, struggled against, as men will their better angels.

All around was silent, and in the gathering darkness he could see Margaret looking at him tenderly; there was no defiance, no hatred in her face now. Would it not be better to leave it thus, with a kindly feeling for him to linger in her heart for long after years, than turn it into enmity, as such must ensue if he harmed Frank?

"Can you not forgive me, George?" broke in Margaret, with soft persuasion in her voice, and coming a step or two nearer to him. "I did not deceive you, though you think I did. When I spoke to you last, then I was as firmly resolved to keep to the path I had marked out for myself, as you believed me to be; there was no deceit, indeed."

"Miss Hall, if—if things had gone differently—if Mr. Miles had come back with plans, in which you were not included, if you had not met again, might I not have had my wish? Might not time have so changed you that you might have regarded me differently?"

Margaret shook her head.

"No, it would have made no difference," she said, with a falter; she could never have loved him, never.

"It is fate, then?"

"Yes."

Mr. Iliffe hesitated a moment or two longer, then turned to Frank.

"It seems we must not quarrel then; if you can forgive me, we will be friends."

He held out his hand, still with a lingering little hope, in spite of himself, that it would be refused; but Frank took it, he bore Mr. Iliffe no malice.

"This was not what I meant, though," George said.

"Nor I either, Mr. Iliffe."

"It is far better," Margaret said.

"Perhaps so, but we will not meet again, Miss Hall," George said. "I am leaving town, and will part from you now and for ever. I have shaken

hands with Mr. Miles, let that satisfy you, we shall not come to blows now as half an hour ago I had intended; but I think it is only in being apart that we can remain at peace. So I am going."

"And we shall not see you again? You go away offended and hurt with me; you were so dear a friend to us when we needed help, surely it is wrong to give you so ill a return; yet what can I do?"

"There was only one thing, Margaret, I wanted—your love, and that, it seems, you could not give me," George said; "for the rest I have done nothing needful of thanks. Good-by."

He shook hands with her, took a long look at the face so dear to him, but lost to him for evermore now, bowed to Frank, and then struck out of the path into the field, and was lost in the darkness and gloom now gathering fast. Margaret never saw him again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SUMMING UP.

A TWELVEMONTH having taken unto itself wings and fled, with its burden of thoughts and events, into the past, since we last held converse with those whose sayings and doings it hath been the purpose of this little history to record, there now devolves upon us the task of glancing at them as we shall leave them ; of seeing how the past time hath used them, and how they are provided for to meet the coming years of struggle and effort, of hope and fear, of cloud and sunshine, that, as human beings, they are necessarily bound to bear as they live on.

For, after all, a short record like this can only take in a phase of the life of each man and woman who figures in it. There are trials to come, and pain to be endured, long after my reader has turned the last page and I have laid down my pen ; and if I told you that they all lived happy ever afterwards, that they were all good-tempered, and that there

never came any clouds either of their own or any one else's making, to mar their sunshine, would you believe me ?

On their journey through life, I can only lend them a helping hand on the way, not guarantee to carry them safely to the end, and guard them from the shoals and quicksands that they may find in their voyage through life. I give this one a good compass to guide him on his course ; to that one I point out the path : it is very clear and straight, and the goal is worth trying for. But ah ! will he follow it ? While to another I give true love to be always near him, kind thoughts following him wherever he may go, and surely that last is no mean gift. I can provide and prophesy for those whose sands of life are nearly run out, and will rest content till the last grain shall fall. But the young and active, with life still before them, and who are arraying themselves for the fray,—how shall I tell how the fight will end ; who shall be crowned, who honoured, who disgraced ?

We find Mr. Gilbert Farrel ensconced in a neat little house, just removed from the town, but near enough to be conveniently reached ; still retaining his place at the mill, and always sure of finding, when he comes from work, the neatest, happiest home

man need desire, and still expresses his conviction, when questioned on the subject by Mr. Francis, that he owns the dearest little wife in all the world. He is proud of her, of his house, of his garden, and very lately, the neighbours say—though, of course, I can't vouch for the fact, and don't half believe it myself—that he has something else to be proud of; something in long frocks, that he dandles for exactly two minutes in his great clumsy arms when he comes home at night, and gets laughed at rarely by little mistress Esther sitting by, and screamed at violently by an elderly female who has lately been added to the little household, though, as Gilbert says very irreverently, “Thank God! not for a permanency!” and to whom that gentleman has taken a huge dislike, which is quite unjustifiable on his part, but which may perhaps be accounted for by a lingering suspicion he has, that she is some distant relation of his old landlady's, from her extreme attachment to the good things of this life, and her virtuous resolve of not only enjoying them herself, but insisting on certain small progeny she has at home doing so likewise, and to a very large extent.

A few months after his marriage, he received a notice of Mr. James Grimmitt's death. Grissel said he never well got over his journey, and from the

time of reaching Birmingham, rapidly sank into extreme feebleness of mind and body, and soon after died.

The Ruebys went back to S—— long since, and the Farrels, going over occasionally, find them doing well. The farm arrangement was a success, and the money invested has been steadily increasing. In addition to these visits, however, Mrs. Farrel finds it quite necessary to carry on a pretty constant correspondence with Mary ; which letters, by the way, she does not always show to her liege lord. Only a few days back, though, she said to him over the breakfast table—where to Gilbert's delight, she has again resumed her proper place—

“ Guess, Gilbert, what is going to happen.”

Considering that she has just laid down a letter from Mary, and the event is evidently connected with it, Gilbert's variety of guesses is not very extensive, and though he pretends, as in duty bound, to be very much puzzled, perhaps he is nearer the matter than he owns.

“ You don't know ? ” Esther says ; “ but guess.”

“ Perhaps Bob has tumbled into the dyke ? No. Perhaps our little Frank has got a new relation ? No. Well, now suppose Mary is going to get married ? ”

Yes, that is it, of course, and to the son of the farmer on whose farm they live ; so when Gilbert

goes to work that morning, busy Mistress Esther begins planning all sorts of absurd schemes in Mary's interest.

Mr. Francis Miles and his wife live at Prestwich. It was Margaret's wish that they should live near her old home; their establishment is not by any means ambitious, but it is admirably appointed, and Mr. Francis certainly misses there none of the style and comfort of the luxurious old house he has abandoned; perhaps, indeed it has been Margaret's particular care that he should not. That gentleman is regular in his attendance at the mill, and has managed with Gilbert Farrel at his right hand, very much to improve the condition of those 'hands' in his pay, without by any means lessening his own profits. He is on good terms with his father, but Mr. Candy Miles has never given the slightest intimation, that his determination to disinherit him is not as inflexible as ever.

Margaret on becoming Mrs. Frank, offered her mother and sister places in her home; but Mrs. Hall, being still in delicate health, and expressing a wish to live at the sea-side, she and her daughter have been established at Bournemouth in Dorsetshire, and with the addition to her small income afforded by Mr. Francis, manages to live very comfortably, and is, I believe, on

the strength of the Fawton blood, getting gradually “into society” there—when there is any to get into.

Mr. Iliffe is still a bachelor, and likely to remain so; but he has struck himself completely out of his circle of friends, and just before Margaret’s marriage, left Manchester altogether. Mr. Wills is much the same as ever, save that his speculations have increased in importance and variety, sometimes failing, sometimes succeeding, which keeps him so in a constant fluctuation from grandeur and opulence, to despair and the verge of bankruptcy, that to a less hardy constitution might have proved fatal long since.

He has again changed his residence, leaving behind him some little creditors, of course—those were fond recollections that Mr. Wills seldom changed his abode without leaving behind him—and he is now in Liverpool looking after some shipping investments, which he has lately turned his attention to; and as Mr. Wills does everything in character, he does this too; and solemnly promenades the pier early in the morning in very loose attire, with a straw hat on his head, and a large telescope under his arm, through which when he has sufficiently attracted general notice, he takes a very leisurely and dignified survey out seaward, then shoulders it, and returns home apparently very much edified by his occupation.

* * * * *

I have not quite finished yet; somehow, now that I have got over my work, there is a strange temptation to linger over it, and a reluctance to blot the last sheet and say, "It is done."

Two more years having gone by, perhaps my reader will think one last glance at Margaret in her home will not be out of place.

One bright spring morning, when Margaret, having walked with her husband some half mile on his way to town, has returned, and is lingering in the garden, she is very happy, and there rises up at times in her heart, during her rambles, a reverent wonder that it should have been reserved for her after that proud, passionate year of struggle and sorrow, to be so deeply, calmly happy.

While she is still here, there comes, all alone up the shaded gravel walk leading to the door, an old friend of ours and hers, a certain kindly, white-headed little cotton spinner, who has chosen this particular morning for paying his first visit to his boy's house. He stops short before he is seen, and looking at the place, with a critical, artistic eye, thinks how well the female figure, in the full light dress, and broad hat, comes on the lawn, and then, treading very softly, he goes and lays a hand on that same

shoulder he has just been admiring, and startles Mistress Margaret rarely.

His greeting is very cordial; he tells her she is looking bravely, and then he puts his arm in hers, and has a long chat with her, in the course of which there comes out the purpose of his visit.

"My dear," says he, "my place is very lonely, now Eliza is married and gone. I should like to see your face there; it would light up the old house. It has seemed very dark of late. Will you and Frank come and live with me?" and he looks at her very kindly from out his grey eyes; and when Frank comes home he finds his wife so very anxious to go, that she will scarce be reasonable on the subject of any delay.

And I think the master is quite right; and it will make the old house brighter; and I see father and son at one table, and a very happy face near them, thanking God silently that they are together again. And it is brighter still when fair-haired children destroy its ceremonious order, and rouse the echoes in the big rooms with childish voices. There is one, the eldest boy, who even penetrates boldly into that sanctum—the master's gallery—and clings, quite confidently, to "big papa's" hand, and the old man's face lights up, as he strokes the golden locks.

Indeed, it is now a daily incident in old Candy's

routine, to have a roll on the carpet with young Candy, who, being fond of exercise, looks forward to the time of day, when he is sure to find his playfellow; who, truth to speak, enjoys the fun with more than boyish glee, and never fails his young companion ; no matter who may call, or what business may demand attention, Rascals has strict orders that the master is engaged, until the game is over.

THE END.

65, Cornhill, London,
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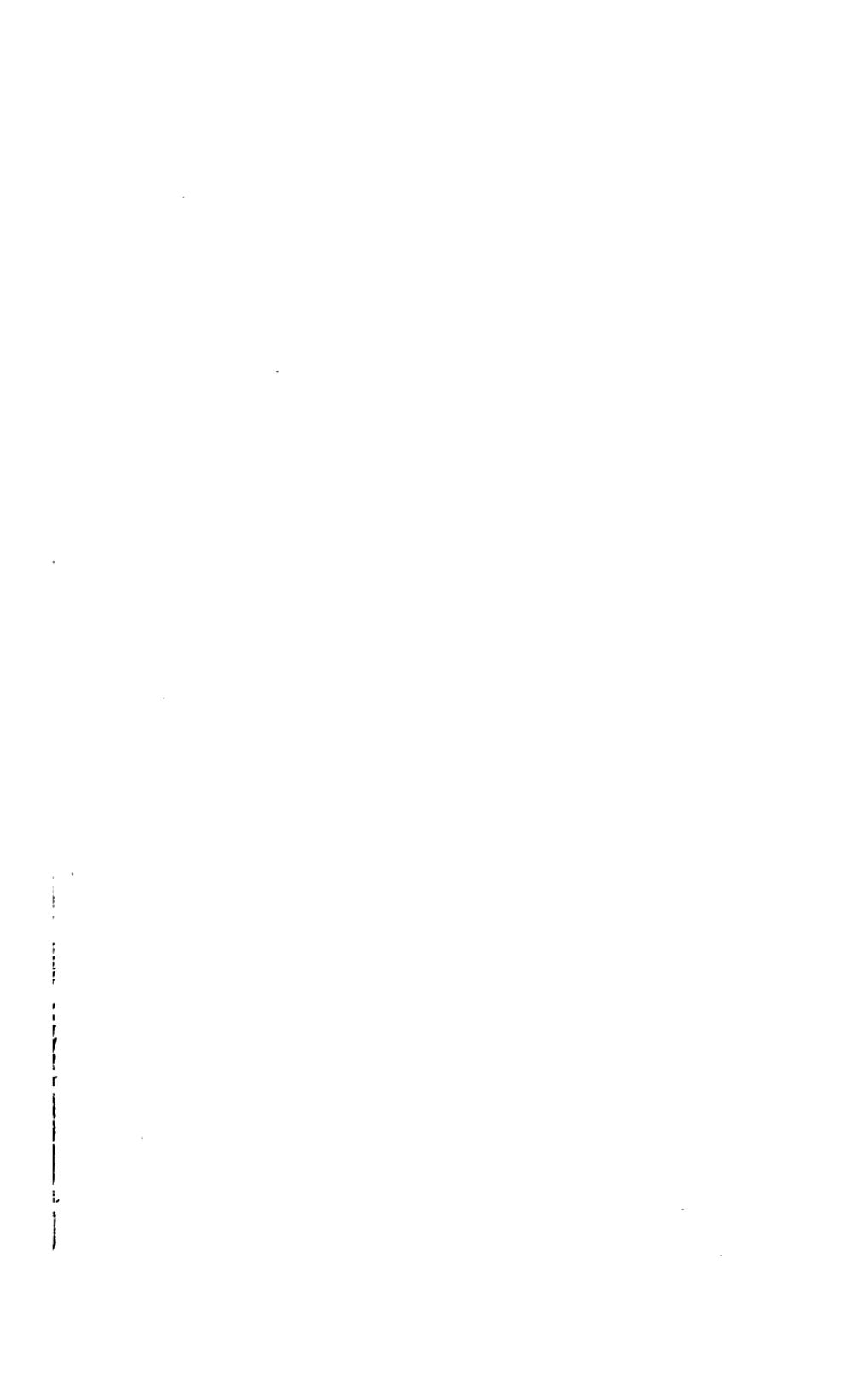
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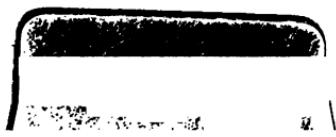
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